

# DISABILITY DISCLOSURE

## What is disability disclosure?

Disclosure refers to making your disability known to others. It can be helpful to take the time to explore what disclosure might look like for you, and it is essential to understand a few things first:

- Disclosure is a personal choice. You are the owner of the decision and should make this based on what is best for you. Deciding if, how and when you would like to disclose is entirely up to you. While various factors may influence your decision, you should not feel pressured by others or outside sources to do so.
- Disclosure is not a one-size-fits-all. What might be best for one may be entirely different for another. When, what, how, and who you disclose to is based on your individual circumstances. Disclosure also looks entirely different for every individual, employer and job opportunity. Always consider your current situation.

## Why would someone choose to disclose?

There are several reasons why disclosure may be considered:

- When an accommodation is required. Disclosure may be necessary when there is a need for an employment accommodation connected to a disability.
- As part of pre-emptive conversations. Disclosure may provide context and understanding, such as acknowledging a visible or noticeable aspect of a disability.
- To present a disability(ies) in a specific manner. Disclosure may be utilized to provide a unique perspective and competitive advantage through lived experience.

Setting up for success: Reflect on questions to understand what purpose the disclosure would serve, including:

- Is your disability visible or invisible? Do you know the essential requirements of the role? Do you know if your disability will impact your role? Have you experienced barriers because of a disability? Are there safety concerns? Have you disclosed in the past? Are you confident in framing your disability? What are the employer's policies and practices on accessibility?

## When would someone choose to disclose?

There are numerous opportunities during the employment experience, including:



<b>Time of Disclosure</b>	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>	<b>Questions to Consider</b>	<b>Recommended Use</b>
<b>On a resume, cover letter or job application</b>	May align with disability employment needs or goals of the employer.	Employer may make inappropriate assumptions that impact their decision to hire you. You may have uncertainty about the reasons for not being selected.	Can you present information about your disability in an effective way? Do you know about the company reputation?	Recommended when your disability is seen as an advantage (employment equity program)
<b>Before an interview</b>	If you need an accommodation, both you and the employer will be better prepared for the interview.	Employer may make inappropriate assumptions that impact their decision to hire you. May equate an interview accommodation as a need for a workplace accommodation.	Do you need an accommodation to be successful in your interview?	Recommended when you require an accommodation for your interview.
<b>During an interview</b>	Allows you to highlight your skills and qualifications, address disability concerns and questions directly.	Employer may focus on your disability rather than on your ability to do the job. You will need to be an effective advocate at a stressful time. could feel defensive.	Can you present your strengths and needs for accommodations in a positive way? Do you understand your skills, strengths and requirements related to the job?	Recommended when you are able to confidently focus on your skills and abilities and are comfortable explaining your disability requirements. When there is need for addressing the topic more directly.
<b>At time of job offer</b>	Gives you the opportunity to discuss your accommodation needs and find out who the best person to approach is. Allows for more appropriate onboarding.	Employer may react poorly or feel you should have told them before the hiring decision was made.	Do you know enough about the job duties to know if you will require accommodation?	Recommended when your disability will impact your work performance.

<b>Time of Disclosure</b>	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>	<b>Questions to Consider</b>	<b>Recommended Use</b>
<b>After you start work</b>	Allows you to prove your capabilities on the job before disclosing. Allows you to have a feel for the optimum timing and process for disclosure.	You may feel nervous about what people think of you if they do not understand disability. You may worry that any difficulty, however minor, will be attributed to your disability.	When, what and whom do you tell? To what extent does stress influence your performance at work, and will you feel more or less stressed if you disclose?	Recommended if by not disclosing you experience unnecessary stress or you need accommodation to do your job.
<b>After an issue occurs</b>	You have likely established some positive working relationships with your supervisor and fellow employees. You have a better understanding of company	You may hurt your work relationships, since your employer or coworkers may feel this should have been disclosed earlier.	Can you present the necessary information at this stage and still avoid defensiveness? Should you wait a while, hoping that things will smooth over?	Recommended if problems or concerns at work persist (need accommodations). Be prepared to educate your employer and coworkers about your disability.
<b>Never</b>	You will not have to explain your disability. Personal information remains protected.	Employer and coworkers will not become more aware or educated about the benefits and value of hiring and working with persons with disabilities.	Does disclosure of your disability have any impact on your ability to do your job? Would you feel more or less comfortable at work if people knew about your disability?	Recommended if you do not require any accommodations In this case, you could choose not to disclose.

**Setting up for success:** Consider the information in the table as examples to inform your decision-making, not as requirements. Again, each scenario will be unique based on the unique contexts and information available.

## How would someone choose to disclose?

Script and practice disclosing. A disclosure script could include:

- A brief description of the disability. Be concise and avoid using clinical or technical terms. This description does not need to include a diagnosis.
- An emphasis on your job-related skills and abilities. You want to convey that you are a qualified candidate/employee because of a disability!
- A description of the barriers that you may/do experience in the workplace.
- Suggestions for accommodations (if applicable) and your willingness to collaborate further.

### Sample scripts:

“I have/am (*highlight your strengths/skills/abilities/qualifications relevant to the job*) and can perform the job's essential functions. But sometimes (*mention your limitations*) might impact my ability to (*describe the duties you may have difficulty performing*). I work best when (*describe the specific accommodations you need to support the duties you have difficulty performing*), and I look forward to continuing this discussion.”

### If you feel more comfortable naming your disability, you could also explore:

“Although I don't anticipate any problems, I did want to mention that I have (*the preferred term for your disability*). I know that my (*one or two strengths*) will allow me to excel in this position; however, sometimes (*indicate your limitations*) might interfere with my ability to (*describe the duties you may have difficulty performing*). In the past, I have found that I can overcome this issue with (*describe specific accommodations you need*), and I welcome an opportunity to discuss this further.”

**Setting up for success:** Personalize the information to align with your values and the goals of your disclosure. Remember, disclosure can be connected to an accommodation request but does not need to be. Consider this for the information you include, such as accommodation examples.

## Who would someone choose to disclose to?

**For non-accommodation disclosure:** This will depend on the goal or intention behind the disclosure. This tends to include only those who you directly work with and may include:

- Colleague(s)/peer(s)

- Supervisor

**For accommodation disclosure:** share only what's needed to accommodate the people who accommodate you. This may include:

- Manager/Supervisor
- Human Resources (HR)
- Occupational health nurse or specialist

**Setting up for success:** Reflect on the purpose of the disclosure to help identify the best person to disclose to. For accommodations, the request does not have to start with a specific person, but it will eventually need to go to a particular person. Even if you disclose an accommodation request to someone who does not manage the requests, you should be directed to the most appropriate contact. No door is the wrong door!

## Disability rights and disclosure

People with disabilities are protected from discrimination and barriers in accessing services and employment by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Canadian Human Rights Act, along with provincial and territorial human rights codes. This protection applies to the act of disclosure and accommodations. The Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) also protects job seekers against unlawful questions. Should an employer have follow-up questions as part of the disclosure/accommodation process, these questions must be related to the skills and abilities needed to perform the job.

Here are some examples of questions that employers are and are not permitted to ask:

### **Question employers are permitted to ask:**

- How would you perform this particular task?
- Are you able to work full-time hours?
- Are you able to meet the requirements for this position?
- Is the lighting OK? Does this desk meet your needs?

### **Questions employers are not permitted to ask:**

- Do you have any disabilities or medical conditions? What are they?
- How did you become disabled? What is your diagnosis?
- How often do you miss work for doctor's appointments?

**Handling inappropriate questions: Consider different strategies in responding, including:**

- Answer the question directly (if you are comfortable doing so)
- Consider the intention behind it. Perhaps you are asked about missing work because of a disability. In this case, respond in the context of performing the job duties, “it sounds like you are wondering if I am dependable. I am very dedicated to my job, and my previous manager can support this”
- Ask for clarification and how the question applies to the job
- Politely decline to answer

**Setting up for success:** Consider how you would respond to different questions by practicing your disclosure script and reflecting on its necessary components, including strengths/abilities, limitations/barriers, and accommodation supports/strategies, with the role's essential requirements.

## Accommodation documentation

Disclosure can be considered the first step in the accommodation process. It involves informing the accommodation provider (employer) that you have a disability and require accommodations. Once that happens, the employer must accept accommodation requests in good faith. This means they should start by believing in and accepting the disability requirements while considering whether additional information is needed to help them determine the appropriate accommodations.

Organizations should limit requests for information to those reasonably related to the nature of the limitation or restriction to assess needs and make the accommodation. The type of information that accommodation seekers may generally be expected to provide to support an accommodation includes:

- that the person has a disability
- the limitations or needs associated with the disability
- whether the person can perform the essential duties or requirements of the job with or without accommodation
- the type of accommodation(s) that may be needed to allow the person to fulfill the essential duties or requirements of the job
- any required updates or re-assessments

**Setting up for success:** Write the accommodation request and reflect on whether to include documentation as part of this first communication. Consider letting the employer determine if they require additional information before including it. It will be important to prepare yourself, as you may need documentation to support the employer in determining the appropriate accommodation, so don't be shocked or defensive if that does happen. Consider what documentation you can provide (note from healthcare provider, etc.) that contains only the necessary information (see above). For students registered with **AccessAbility Services**, consider requesting a **verification letter** of your academic accommodations that you can give your employer if needed. This letter does not provide any

medical/personal information (such as diagnosis) but does include your academic accommodation eligibilities that can support the discussion with your employer about appropriate employment accommodations.

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Content for this resource was adapted from:

- **Job Seekers Guide for Students and Graduates with Disabilities** (David C. Onley Initiative)
- **University of Waterloo's Co-operative Education Self-Study Guide**
- **Policy on ableism and discrimination based on disability** - Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC)

For questions or additional support related to disability disclosure, please connect with your co-op and/or career advisor, as well as the Co-op Student Experience Manager (Accessibility) at: **[co-op.accessibility@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:co-op.accessibility@uwaterloo.ca)**