



## Students with Disabilities

### JOB SEARCH TIPS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

This guide is designed to help you with the job search process and provide specialized resources if you have a disability.

#### SHOULD I DISCLOSE MY DISABILITY?

The issue of whether or not to disclose a disability to a potential employer is a common concern and a very personal decision. Before deciding if, when and how to disclose your disability, consider the following:

- Is your disability visible?
- Does not disclosing put your safety or the safety of others at risk?
- Is building accessibility an issue? Do you need accommodations for the interview or if you get the job?
- If you disclose, will you be able to reassure the employer that you can do the work?
- Will the employer think you're dishonest if the disability is "discovered" rather than "disclosed" and how would you deal with that reaction?
- What misconceptions might the employer have about your disability?

- How do people react when they learn of your disability & how do you deal with the reaction?
- When might you feel most comfortable and confident disclosing your disability?
- What do you know about the employer's policies & experiences regarding people with disabilities?

You may decide to disclose your disability up front when you submit your application, or you may choose to wait.

#### ***Disclosing "Invisible" Disabilities***

Disclosing an invisible disability such as a psychiatric condition, epilepsy, or a learning disability can be a difficult dilemma. Unless an invisible disability is a safety issue and puts you or someone else at risk, or if you need accommodations, telling an employer is a matter of personal choice. If you do choose not to disclose an invisible disability, it is important to get a letter from your doctor stating that, as of this date, you are fit to work and keep the letter for your records.

## ***Preparation is Key***

Regardless of when or if you choose to disclose a disability in your career search, it is in your best interest to plan and be prepared to handle the disclosure in a professional and positive manner.

### **Examples:**

- When scheduling an interview, you can easily ask if the building is accessible or indicate you will be bringing an interpreter. To make sure this information is communicated correctly be sure to speak to the person with whom you're interviewing rather than the receptionist.
- During the course of the interview, if you are asked for your strengths, you may indicate that you have a disability that often causes you to look for different ways to do things and as a result, you are very good at creative problem solving and thinking outside the box.
- Employers are allowed to ask if you are able to perform key functions of the job. If asked this question, reassure the interviewer of your ability to perform the key tasks and take the opportunity to discuss any reasonable accommodations you may need. See the next page for more information on your rights under the ADA.

## **EMPLOYER EDUCATION**

Employers want applicants who have the skills, experience and ability to do the job. Many may have little or no experience hiring people with disabilities and could have misconceptions of how a particular disability may or may not impact your ability to get the job done. This is your chance to dispel any doubts or erroneous information the employer may have.

For example, if you have a visual impairment and are interviewing for an office position explain:

- The fundamentals of your disability
- How it could potentially impact the way you perform your job
- What accommodations you might use to mitigate that impact (e.g. screen reading software and headphones, optical devices to magnify print, etc.)

Taking the lead in this conversation will help you assure an employer that you have the required skills and that any accommodations are simply tools that enable you to get work done as efficiently as anyone else.



# YOUR RIGHTS UNDER THE ADA

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) makes it unlawful to discriminate in employment against a qualified individual with a disability. This section was adapted from the EEOC website: [www.eeoc.gov](http://www.eeoc.gov)

## ***Am I Protected by the ADA?***

If you have a disability and are qualified to do a job, the ADA protects you from job discrimination on the basis of your disability. Under the ADA, you have a disability if you have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity, such as hearing, seeing, speaking, walking, breathing, performing manual tasks, caring for oneself, learning or working. If you have a disability, you must also be qualified to perform the essential functions or duties of a job, with or without reasonable accommodation

## ***What is Reasonable Accommodation?***

Reasonable accommodation is any change or adjustment to a job or work environment that permits a qualified applicant or employee with a disability to participate in the job application process, to perform the essential functions of a job, or to enjoy benefits and privileges of employment equal to those enjoyed by employees without disabilities.

Examples:

- providing or modifying equipment or devices,
- job restructuring,
- part-time or modified work schedules,
- reassignment to a vacant position,
- adjusting or modifying examinations, training materials, or policies,
- providing readers and interpreters, and
- making the workplace readily accessible to and usable by people with disabilities.

The employer cannot refuse to hire you because of your disability if you can perform the essential functions of the job with an accommodation.

## ***Illegal Questions***

An employer CANNOT ask:

- If you have a disability
- The nature or severity of your disability

An employer CAN ask:

- If you can perform the duties of the job with or without reasonable accommodation

# YOUR ACCOMMODATION PLAN

Consider your specific accommodation needs in advance. Take time to research the appropriate and most cost effective options for your particular disability and the type of work you are pursuing. You can then arrange to test the items, tools or technology to learn which ones best meet your needs and get an estimate of potential costs. Employers will appreciate a proactive approach.

Strategies for requesting and negotiating accommodations will be dictated by your unique situation. Rapid advancements in technology have significantly expanded and reduced the cost of many accommodation options. Devices such as smart phones, tablets and apps are widely available and often very affordable. In general, workplace accommodations are low cost and high impact and may benefit other employees within the organization.