



DISCLOSURE AND ACCOMMODATION GUIDE FOR THE WORKPLACE



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

CONTENTS

- Introduction** 1
- Academic and workplace accommodations: How do they compare? 1
- What is a workplace accommodation? 2
- What is an academic accommodation? 2
- How can academic accommodations be reframed for the workplace? 2
- Know your rights** 3
- What does the law say? 3
- What is the duty to accommodate? 3
- Under what circumstances would you need to disclose? 3
- How much information do you need to provide in order to receive accommodations? 3
- Know yourself** 4
- What are your strengths and skills? 4
- What do you want in a workplace? 4
- What are your accessibility needs in a workplace? 5
- Know the job** 5
- What is the job description, expectations, and responsibilities? 5
- What is the company policy and commitment to accessibility? 5
- Disclosure timing**..... 6
- When do you disclose? 6
- How to disclose: What do you say?**..... 13
- Writing a disclosure script 13
- Disclosure script samples 13
- Next steps** 15
- Appendix: Disclosure Decision Worksheet** 16
- Disclosure Decision Tree 17

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the *Disclosure & Accommodation Guide for the Workplace*. Ideally, there will come a time when workplaces wholeheartedly celebrate diversity and people will have universal access to workplaces, eliminating the need for disclosure. And while we recognize this is the aim, we know the world of work is not there yet. Although this guide is focused on addressing accommodations related to disability, we know that how you approach and navigate disclosure and accommodation conversations will also be impacted by your lived experience of other systems of exclusion, including racism, sexism, etc. As an example, you may need to navigate conversations with your employer about accommodations regarding your disability and/or religion or care-giving responsibilities as well as raise concerns related to inclusion in the workplace.

This guide is designed to help you navigate disclosure and accommodation conversations throughout your job search process. While decisions about disclosure and accommodation are different for everyone, we hope this guide will help you consider what is important to you, so you can determine what approach works best. Whatever choice you make, we hope you will feel more prepared to discuss disclosure and accommodation in a way that emphasizes the unique strengths, skills, and talents you bring to your work.

In this guide we address common questions related to disclosure and accommodation, including: Do I need to disclose? When should I disclose? Who do I disclose to? What do I say? Our aim is to be as comprehensive as we can in addressing the most common concerns, however, we recognize that you still may have questions. It can be helpful to discuss your decision with someone you trust. We encourage you to use this guide in conversation with those in your circle of support: peers, counsellors, family, mentors, placement supervisors, etc.

What is disclosure?

Disclosure is when you explain the impact of any disability related barriers on your work to an employer. Disclosing your accessibility needs to an employer, or a potential employer, is personal. It can be difficult to know whether you should disclose and how much to share. Remember, you only need to share this information if you need accommodations to perform the essential duties and responsibilities of the job.

You may have additional reasons for disclosing. While it is not the case for everyone, some view disclosure as a way to challenge stigma and create space for people to bring their whole selves to work.

Reasons for disclosure vary from person to person and it's helpful to reflect on what is important for you. If you do decide to disclose to an employer, remember that you do not have to reveal a diagnosis.

Academic and workplace accommodations:

How do they compare?

What is a workplace accommodation?

Workplace accommodations involve a change to the work environment or your duties in order for you to successfully carry out the job responsibilities and participate in daily work activities. Workplace accommodations are meant to provide equitable and non-discriminatory opportunities for participation. Accommodations “level the playing field” and are obtained through ongoing conversations. They may be implemented at the beginning of employment, or later as needed, and may change according to the nature of work or accessibility needs over time.

Some accommodations that an employer may offer or provide include:

- Scheduling accommodations (shifts at certain times or a compressed work week, or allow for part-time, full-time or flex hours)
- Ability to work from home
- Provide time off for medical appointments, and accept some degree of absences due to a disability
- Modify or reconfigure duties or transfer employees to a different position
- Informational accommodations (documents in digital form or real-time captioning/ASL interpreters at meetings)
- Workstation accommodations (raised desk or a quiet workstation)
- Structural accommodations (automatic doors, wheelchair ramps, or accessible washrooms, dimmer lighting)
- Purchase or modify computers for use by employees with visual or other impairments
- Offer training or hire an assistant
- Specific computer software (e.g., magnifying software, speech-to-text software, etc.)

Many accommodations are inexpensive and can be easily implemented, however some accommodations may take time to set up. All accommodations provided by the employer should be decided upon in collaboration with the employee.

What is an academic accommodation?

The term “academic accommodation” may be used to describe an adjustment of environment, curriculum format, or equipment that allows an individual with a disability to gain access to content and/or complete assigned tasks. If you have an academic accommodation, you are still required to achieve the same standards and level of competency as your peers, but the way you demonstrate knowledge and skills acquisition may be altered.

How can academic accommodations be reframed for the workplace?

There are several strategies and tools you can use to assist you in the workplace. Depending upon your disability-related needs and the job requirements, you may be able to implement some of the strategies on your own. Others will require an accommodation request.

Consider these:

Barrier	Academic accommodations you may have had	Strategies & accommodations	
Time management (prioritization, memory recall, stress under pressure, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extensions to manage multiple deadlines • Grading steps of a large assignment into smaller assignments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using software like Trello for task lists • Schedule regular email reminders • Use a wall/online calendar to highlight days to start work, not just deadlines • Take time at the end of each day to organize and set up for the next day • Inquire how long a particular task should take if unsure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Divide large assignments or projects into several small tasks or chunks in order of importance/priority • Create a flow chart of tasks that must be performed at the same time, carefully labeling, or colour-coding each task in sequential or preferential order or level of importance)
Concentration/ Focus and Audio/Visual Distractions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distraction-reduced - private room (test-taking) • Allow for assigned seating near the front to minimize class distractions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove or reduce distractions from work area • Request breaks to increase stamina including short walks, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> getting up for a drink of water, and rotating through varied tasks • Use a noise-cancelling headset or earplug, or a white noise machine • Working from home

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Whether or not to request an accommodation is your choice. Once you know your responsibilities as well as the employer's, we hope you'll feel empowered and ready to make that choice.

What does the law say?

With regards to disabilities in the workplace, there are two main pieces of legislation that you can reference: the *Ontario Human Rights Code (OHRC)* and the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)*.

The OHRC says that every person has a right to equal treatment with respect to employment without discrimination because of disability. Employers have an obligation to ensure this right is not violated.

What is the duty to accommodate?

Employers have a duty to make every reasonable effort, short of "undue hardship" to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities in the workplace. This is accomplished through a collaborative process to explore what accommodations are appropriate and feasible. Considerations for accommodations must be made when an employee presents their accessibility needs to the employer.

If an employer fails to consider an accommodation request or does not provide a valid reason why an accommodation cannot be implemented, you may seek support from the Human Rights Legal Support Centre (hrlsc.on.ca) or the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario (hrto.ca).

Review the policy on ableism and discrimination based on disability for more information.

Under what circumstances would you need to disclose?

Living with any type of disability does not necessarily mean that you will require accommodations in the workplace. Many people have developed strategies to mitigate the impacts of barriers to accessibility on a daily basis and do not require accommodations at work.

While some visible disabilities may prompt employers to inquire about accommodation needs, non-evident disabilities, such as diabetes or mental health conditions, are not evident. Your employer will not be able to provide accommodations if they are not aware of your accessibility needs. If you feel that you will require accommodations to fulfill the duties of the role, it is your responsibility to notify your employer.

How much information do you need to provide to receive accommodations?

For an employer to provide appropriate accommodations, they must be made aware of the disability-related barriers that an employee may experience. This does not mean that you need to disclose any specific diagnosis of disability, but it does require that you provide information for any impacts on the essential duties of the job.

Additional information may be requested by a manager and/or Human Resources department in support of an accommodation request. This may include a note from a qualified health care professional. In this case, an employer still has the responsibility to maintain confidentiality, ensuring that this additional information is only shared with those who need to be aware, i.e. HR.

KNOW YOURSELF

What are your strengths and skills?

Knowing yourself is important in determining how you will navigate disclosure. It's also important when considering if a job is right for you. While the disclosure and accommodation process does require you to consider the workplace barriers you may experience, it is equally important that you identify areas of strength and proficiency. Take the time to consider what strengths, skills, and experiences you have gained from work, volunteer, academic and extra-curricular activities. If you are better able to recognize the skills and experiences that you bring, it will be easier for you to highlight them to a potential employer.

Skills are generally defined as either soft or technical/field-specific. A transferable skill can be either soft or technical and can be applied in different roles and workplace settings.

Which of these *transferable skills* do you have?

Skills are generally defined as either transferrable skills or field-specific skills.

A transferable skill can be applied to different roles and workplace settings.

Which of these *technical/field-specific skills* do you have?

Report writing, computer skills, customer service, research skills, data analysis, design skills, lab skills, project management.

Your campus career office can help you identify your strengths and create a plan to further develop your skills.

What do you want in a workplace?

Employment opportunities can lead to income, skills development, enhancement of interest or passion, and network building. It is essential that you reflect on what you want from the potential opportunity in order to make it meaningful. Consider how the prospective workplace can provide you with opportunities for career development and personal growth. This includes both short-term and long-term goals that you may have.

Example: A retail position may not necessarily match your personal interests, but the communication skills gained can be transferred and used in subsequent work experiences.

What are your accessibility needs in a workplace?

Think about any barriers that you have experienced with your disability (chronic and/or episodic), in your daily life, school, or other employment environments in the past. This can help you anticipate what barriers you may encounter, and what accommodations you may need in order to be successful in the workplace.

This can be difficult for episodic disabilities, as you may not be able to anticipate the frequency and/or severity of a flare up. Consequently, accommodation needs can change according to how you are being impacted by your disability.

Example: Low energy in the morning due to use of medication may require flexible work hours.

KNOW THE JOB

What is included in the job posting: Expectations, tasks and responsibilities

A thorough review of the job posting will give you a better idea of what is expected in the role. Many job postings will provide information on hours of work, amount of time using computer and/or screens, indication of any heavy lifting, etc. Information on the level of competency for certain skills (example: computer literacy) is often indicated in the job posting as well. Make note that there is a difference between “essential requirements” that all employees must have in order to do the job, and “assets” which are good-to-have qualities.

This information can help you determine how you can leverage your strengths to perform the duties of the job. It will also help you identify any workplace barriers you may encounter and if you will require any accommodations in order to meet the needs of the position.

What is the company's policy and commitment to accessibility?

You can also find out more about the company and their policy around accommodations by visiting the company website or speaking to an employee. Review the vision, mission, and value statements of a company where a commitment to accessibility and inclusivity would be mentioned.

Many job search platforms also collect information and feedback from employees regarding various aspects of their work and the culture of a company. You may also want to connect with current or past employees by searching LinkedIn or in your own networks. This can help you determine if the workplace is suitable for your interests and needs.

DISCLOSURE TIMING

When do you disclose?

Disclosure of disability can happen at any (or more than one) point of the employment process. Depending on the need, you may disclose during the job application, prior to an interview, during an interview, after you have been hired, or after you have been on the job for some time. It is important to consider the opportunities and challenges of disclosure at each point of the employment process to determine what feels right for you.

While the timing of disclosure can be tough to navigate, you do not need to do this alone. Review the timing considerations on the following pages with someone from your Career or Accessibility office for more support.

TIMING: **NEVER**



Opportunity

Never disclosing means that an employer will not assume performance issues are related to your disability.

You may never disclose because the environment and systems are accessible.



Challenge

Never disclosing means that accommodations will not be made, and this may impact your work experience.



Tips

Depending on the job, you may be able to implement strategies to help you be successful without having to make a formal accommodation request. (i.e., strategies for time management).

Carefully consider the essential duties of the job before you decide.



Questions to consider

What if I need an accommodation in the future? What if something changes in the job duties or my health?

**TIMING:
DURING YOUR
APPLICATION
PROCESS**
(I.E., COVER
LETTER)

Opportunity



The organization may have intentional diversity recruitment initiatives, such as a disability-specific employment program.

Disclosing at this stage may also mean fewer disability-related challenges when you become employed.

Challenge



A job application has limited space to describe your abilities and does not allow you to address the employer's concerns if any arise.

If you are not selected for an interview after disclosing a disability on a job application, you may question if the disclosure played a role.

Tips



Wherever you apply, check out the HR website of the company for information about accessibility policies.

Ask people in your network about their workplace, including accommodation policies and procedures.

Questions to consider



Do I have enough space in my application to highlight my strengths and discuss any necessary accommodations?

Does the employer have an equity statement indicating that people with disabilities are welcome?

Example of disclosure during application process:

1. Include involvement in disability-related activities on your resume, cover letter or further education application (i.e., previous work experience as a Peer Accessibility Advisor).
2. In the closing paragraph of the cover letter "I am confident that I have the ability to be successful in this role. I am someone who works best when (describe ideal working conditions). Sometimes this may require accommodations. I look forward to discussing my qualifications and relevant accessibility needs during an interview."

**TIMING:
WHEN AN
EMPLOYER
CONTACTS YOU
TO OFFER YOU AN
INTERVIEW**

Opportunity



Disclosing when offered an interview allows you to request any accommodations that you require for the interview.

You'll also know that the employer is already interested in you.



Challenge

An employer might develop a preconceived notion about your disability before you have a chance to discuss your abilities.



Tips

Be prepared to discuss any real or perceived issues related to your disability at the interview.

Questions to consider



Is my disability visible, invisible or a combination?

Do I need accommodations to access the interview location? (e.g., wheelchair accessible building, extra time to arrive, additional supports)

Will I need accommodations during the interview? (e.g., large print for any written documents/tests, a printout of the interview questions, live captions)

Example of disclosure at time of interview offer:

1. "Thank you for this great news. Can you please share where the accessible entrance to your office is located?"
2. "I am excited to be interviewed for this position. I want to share that I have some accessibility-related needs for the interview and would like to discuss accommodations."

TIMING:
**DURING THE
EMPLOYMENT
INTERVIEW**



Opportunity

Opportunity to respond positively and in-person about why you should be hired, to an employer that you know is already interested in you.



Challenge

Keep in mind that it is impossible to predict how someone will react and the interview setting allows limited time for discussion.



Tips

Some employers routinely ask candidates if they anticipate any challenges or require any accommodations. Come prepared to discuss necessary accommodations and strengths that result from your disability. Remember you do not have to share a diagnosis.

Ensure the focus of the interview remains on your ability to do the job well, and not on potential issues.

If your references know about your disability, make sure they know what approach for disclosure you will be taking.



Questions to consider

- How will I answer questions pertaining to my ability to perform tasks?
- Do I have any concerns with how the disclosure will be received?

Example of disclosure during an interview:

1. "My disability gives me a unique perspective and skillset, such as _____ that will be an asset to your team."
2. "One of the tools/strategies I use that assists me in being successful in my work is _____." (Describe an example demonstrating its use)
3. "I am at my best when _____."

**TIMING:
WHEN THE
EMPLOYER
OFFERS YOU
THE JOB**



Opportunity

Gives the employer time to put accommodations in place before you start work. If you can do the essential functions of the job, but the disclosure changes the hiring decision, you may have legal recourse.



Challenge

The employer may think that they should have been informed earlier.



Tips

Discuss your accommodation needs in person or over the phone so you can address any potential issues.

This is also a time to think about negotiations. When a job is offered, it is the time to negotiate other details like salary, benefits, and vacation time.



Questions to consider

Knowing what I know about this job, are there any tasks for which I would require accommodations?

Example of disclosure after a job offer:

1. "Thank you very much for the offer. I am very excited to work with you and your organization. I am confident that I can be successful in this role, and would like to discuss some accommodations I may need."

Note: Refer to the disclosure scripts at the end of this guide for more examples

**TIMING:
AFTER YOU
HAVE STARTED
THE JOB**



Opportunity

Gives you the opportunity to understand the job tasks as they relate to your needs.

If the disclosure affects your employment status, you may have legal recourse.



Challenge

The employer may think they should have been informed earlier.



Tips

Be sure you're disclosing to the appropriate person; that may be your direct supervisor, or a human resources representative.

Consult with your union representative, if applicable.

Request a private meeting and remind the employer about your right to confidentiality.



Questions to consider

What will be my approach should an accommodation become necessary?

Are there workplace policies that you can consult?

Example of disclosure after starting a job:

1. "Thank you for meeting with me. I have really been enjoying this role and feel connected to my work. I do think it is important that I share that I experience/have (describe disability), which can require me to attend medical appointments depending on fluctuations in my health. I wanted to bring this up early, so that we can work together on accommodating those in my schedule."

**TIMING:
A WORKPLACE
CHALLENGE
OCCURS**



Opportunity

Gives you the opportunity to understand the job and demonstrate your strengths and skills.



Challenge

Waiting until there is a problem may impact your relationships with your manager and co-workers.



Tips

Be aware if problems arise that are related to your disability and address your concerns as soon as possible.

Consider the accommodations you will need and emphasize the aspects of the work that have been going well. Consult with your union representative, if applicable.



Questions to consider

Does not disclosing put myself or others safety at potential risk?

Does your workplace actively promote diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility?

Do you feel respected by your employer and co-workers? How can you leverage trusted relationships?

Example of disclosure after a workplace challenge occurs:

1. "In this role, I have been able to utilize my existing strengths and develop some new skillsets. I have noticed that I experience difficulty when _____. Some of the possible solutions to help me include_____. I would appreciate your support in implementing these strategies."

Note: Please refer to the sample disclosure scripts at the end of the guide to help you think about what you might want to say when you disclose.

HOW TO DISCLOSE: WHAT DO YOU SAY?

Writing a disclosure script

If you are unsure about how to disclose, it can be helpful to create and practice a disclosure script. Coming to a disclosure discussion prepared with an idea of what you want to say can help ensure you are successfully able to communicate your points in an organized, concise, and strengths-focused way.

Disclosure script considerations

When planning how you will disclose to an employer, it may be helpful to answer the following questions:

1. What are my key strengths and abilities and how does it relate to the job I am applying for? (Tip: you can consult your resume and/or job posting when answering this.)
2. What barriers may I experience in this role? (Tip: think of what a barrier could be, and not what you need to learn for the job.)
3. What accommodations may I need to succeed in this role? What has worked before? (Tip: think back to your academic accommodations, what worked well for you?)

Once you have considered the answers to the above questions, arrange the information into concise sentences that you can practice with others. We acknowledge that this is just the beginning of the conversation and that the disclosure and accommodation is an ongoing dialogue with the employer.

Sample disclosure script 1

A co-op student with dyslexia has applied and received a job offer as a software developer. They have answered the three questions in the following way:

1. What are my key strengths and abilities and how does it apply to the job I am applying for?
I am very good at technical skills like coding and problem solving under pressure.
2. What barriers may I experience in this role?
I may struggle to write extensive reports and other pieces of writing that are lengthy.
3. What accommodations may I need in this role? What has worked in the past?
*I may need extra time for reading and writing.
Extra time to read and write assignments and tests have worked well during school.*

Putting everything together, this student's disclosure script may look something like:

"I would like to mention I have a learning disability. I am confident in my ability to perform the job requirements, specifically as it relates to my coding and problem-solving skills. With regards to written communication, in the past, I have found that extra time to write (e.g. advance notice and/or extended due date) has been very helpful for me, as the extra time allows me to proof-read my written work and meet requested deadlines. Please let me know when it is a good time to meet and discuss an accommodation plan. Thanks in advance for keeping this confidential."

Sample disclosure script 2

A recent graduate who is recovering from a concussion has received a job offer research assistant position in a biology lab. They have answered the four questions in the following way:

1. What are my key strengths and abilities and how does it apply to the job I am applying for?
I am very good at analyzing data, keeping detailed observation notes, and summarizing findings in a report.
2. What barriers may I experience in this role?
I may struggle to sit in a brightly lit and noisy office for long periods of times.
3. What accommodations may I need in this role? What has worked in the past?
*I may need reduced lighting and noise cancelling headphones.
Taking regularly scheduled breaks and having softer lighting and headphones while I was writing exams have helped me.*

Putting everything together, this individual's disclosure script may look something like:

"I am really excited about this opportunity, as I know I will be able to excel in this position. I am confident in my ability to analyze data, keep detailed observation notes and synthesizing findings in a summative report. In relation to the work environment, an office that is brightly lit or noisy can make it difficult for me to work. In the past, regularly scheduled breaks, softer lighting, and noise cancelling headphones allowed me to better concentrate on my work. These accommodations have been very helpful for me. I would like to request a meeting to discuss the process for putting these put in place."

Sample disclosure script 3

A recent graduate who has Social Anxiety Disorder has received a job offer for a communications assistant role at a small non-profit organization. They have answered the questions in the following way:

1. What are my key strengths and abilities and how does it apply to the job I am applying for?
I am a very competent writer, excelling in copy editing, and writing digital content.
2. What barriers may I experience in this role?
I may have difficulty presenting or talking in front of groups. Noisy or chaotic environments can also be challenging.
3. What accommodations may I need in this role? What has worked in the past?
*Private workspace.
Opportunities to share my ideas with written communication both in advance and after meetings.
A team approach for presentations, where my role can be primarily focused on creating the presentation.*

Putting everything together, this individual's disclosure script may look something like:

"Thank you for this great news! I am excited about the opportunity to work with your organization. This is a position that will allow me to grow and develop in my career. I want to take this opportunity to share a bit more about myself. I experience anxiety in some social situations, such as speaking in front of groups of people. During university I had accommodations for presentations and group work, that allowed me to be successful. While I understand that the workplace is a different environment, I am confident that we can find comparable strategies that will work. When would be a good time to discuss this further?"

NEXT STEPS

We hope that this guide has helped you understand more about disclosure and accommodation. We expect that you may have more questions. You will find the Disclosure Decision Worksheet at the end of the guide that you can use to collect your thoughts and begin to develop your approach. You may want to share your ideas and concerns with a career educator or an accessibility advisor to assist you in creating your plan.

Office contact

UTM Career Centre

3359 Mississauga Rd., Mississauga, ON L5L 1C6

Phone: 905-828-5451

E-mail: careers.utm@utoronto.ca

UTM Accessibility Services

3359 Mississauga Rd. Mississauga, ON, Canada, L5L 1C6

Davis Building, Room 2037B

Phone: 905-569-4699

Email: access.utm@utoronto.ca

UTSC Academic Success and Career Centre

1265 Military Trail AC213, Scarborough, ON M1C 1A5

Phone: 416-287-756

E-mail: aacc.utsc@utoronto.ca

UTSC AccessAbility Services

1265 Military Trail, Scarborough, Ontario

M1C 1A4, Arts & Administration Building, AA142

Tel/TTY: 416-287-7560

Email: ability.utsc@utoronto.ca

UTSG Career Exploration and Education

800 Bay Street, 5th floor Toronto, ON M5S 3A9

Phone: 416-978-8000

Email: careercentre@mail.careers.utoronto.ca

UTSG Accessibility Services

455 Spadina Avenue, 4th floor, Suite 400, Toronto, Ontario, M5S 2G8.

Phone: 416-978-8060

Email: accessibility.services@utoronto.ca

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APPENDIX

Disclosure Worksheet

Knowing myself and my accessibility needs

How I describe my disability:	Potential barriers:
My top strengths and skills:	Accommodations I have had in the past:
My career areas of interest:	Accommodations I may need at work:

Disclosure Decision Tree

(Adapted from Virginia Commonwealth University's *Disclosure Decisions to get the Job*)



