

RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Many students with visible or invisible disabilities struggle to decide if they should disclose a disability in an academic or employment setting. This is a very personal decision that can only be made by you. It's important to learn what strengths you have to offer an employer, how to manage your job search, and how to seek out accommodations when necessary.

Career Development Center

The Career Development Center (CDC) supports students with physical, learning, sensory, psychological, developmental, and other disabilities. We encourage students to make one-on-one appointments with CDC staff members so that we can advise you on issues such as your career plan, job search strategies, and ways of highlighting your strengths.

Log in to your **Handshake** account. Under the Career Center tab select appointment to meet with a CDC staff member. Utilize the Jobs and Events tabs to search for positions and stay up to date on upcoming events.

Office of Accessibility Services

If you identify as having a disability, either invisible or visible, please contact the Office of Accessibility Services (OAS) (call **508-831-4908** or email at accessibilityservices@wpi.edu) to learn about the services and supports available to you, including academic accommodations.

Disability Disclosure

Disclosure entails sharing information about your disability in order 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 either a visible or invisible disability. In general, one would disclose a disability in order to receive a work-based accommodation. There is no single 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, 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?

Times to disclose

You can disclose a disability at any stage of the employment process. In most cases you would disclose when you feel you need a work accommodation or adjustment. It is best to be proactive and disclose before you start experiencing work performance issues. Stages at which you might choose to disclose include:

- Pre-employment
- During the interview
- When the job offer has been made
- Post-offer
- 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, such as your direct supervisor, manager, or human resources professional. Under the ADA, employers are required to keep disability information confidential.



How to disclose

Let your employer know that you have a need for a work adjustment. You can simply say that it is for “a reason related to a medical condition.” You do not have to give your specific diagnosis. Remember, you have no obligation to disclose a disability. However, it is your responsibility to seek out the assistance that you need. When you do disclose, it is only necessary to share information about your work limitations, condition, and needed accommodations.

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.

Things to keep in mind

- Why you are disclosing.
- How it affects your interview process.
- How it affects your ability to do key job tasks.
- Types of accommodation that have worked for you in the past.
- What you are your anticipated needs?

What are reasonable accommodations?

A reasonable accommodation encompasses assistance or changes needed to ensure a position or workplace is accessible so that an employee can perform their job with a disability. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Rehabilitation Act, employers are required to provide reasonable accommodations to qualified employees with disabilities, unless doing so would pose an undue hardship. In order to determine what is reasonable, an employer will look at the request being made by the applicant or employee with a disability. Whether or not an accommodation is reasonable will vary greatly according to the position the employee holds, the way their disability affects their ability to do their job, and the environment that they work in.

Some examples of reasonable accommodations may include:

- Alternative Format Material: requesting material in written format rather than verbally
- Accessible Parking: requesting an accessible parking space closer to the proximity of the building
- Equipment Change: requesting software that magnifies a computer screen or certain desk/seating arrangements
- Reorganization of the Job: requesting task-lists to help stay focused on the job
- Possible reassignment: requesting reassignment if the employee can no longer perform the essential functions of their current job. (The employer does not have to create a new position, no other employees need be transferred or terminated in order to make a position vacant for the purpose of reassignment, and the individual with a disability should be qualified for the new position.)

Participate in Work-based Learning Experiences

Participating in a work-based experience such as an internship, co-op, or career shadowing opportunity will help you build confidence and gain soft skills like communication and leadership. Other benefits of work-based learning experiences include:

- Breaking down barriers to employment and opening eyes of employers to your capabilities.
- Providing an opportunity to network with potential employers.
- Exploring career options while in school to decide what's the right fit for you.
- Applying skills learned in the classroom and through project-based experiences.
- Identifying appropriate accommodations and disclosing and discussing disabilities as they relate to the performance of job tasks.

Interview Strategies

Do your homework

If you need accommodations like access to the building, 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. In the case that it is not, have a location in mind in the event that the interviewer needs suggestions.

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

Illegal Interview Questions

The ADA restricts employers from asking certain questions about an applicant's or employee's disability. For example, during an interview, employer's questions should focus on your ability to perform the essential functions of a job and not on the specifics of a disability. However, if an employer asks you an illegal question, you can choose to respond in different ways:

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

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?
- Are you color blind?
- Why do you use a wheelchair? Will we have to make an accommodation for your wheelchair
- Describe all of your disabilities

Please let the CDC know if you encounter any illegal questions on a job interview.



Resources

- ABILITYJobs: abilityjobs.com
- Association on Higher Education and Disability: ahead.org
- Getting Hired: Jobs for People with Disabilities: gettinghired.com
- JAN (Job Accommodation Network): askjan.org/index.cfm
- Work Without Limits: workwithoutlimits.org
- National Organization on Disability: nod.org
- National Business & Disability council: viscardicenter.org/services/natl-business-disability-council/
- Disability:in : disabilityin.org
- Worcester Polytechnic Institute Office of Accessibility Services: wpi.edu/student-experience/resources/accessibility-services
- Magazines such as: **DIVERSEability**, and **Ability Magazine**
- Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) ADA Information Line: www.eeoc.gov;
1-800-669-734
- ADA National Network: www.adata.org; 1-800-949-4232

