

Students with Disabilities: To disclose or not to disclose? That is the Question.

You have a disability. Should you tell your potential employer? Only you can answer this question. Disclosing a disability is a very personal decision. Once you have researched the organization and position, The Career Center can help you assess the advantages and disadvantages of disclosing and develop a disclosure strategy.

First, you must ask yourself if your disability is apparent. If you have a visible disability (e.g., you use a wheelchair or a guide dog), decide whether you will mention your disability on your resume or before you go to an interview. If you are concerned about accessibility, you may need to disclose to ensure that you will not have any problems getting to the interview site. Be prepared to address the employer's concerns regarding your abilities and know what specific accommodations you will need on the job.

If you have a hidden disability (e.g. learning disability, chronic health problem, ADD), the disclosure issue is a much trickier one. It will not be obvious to the employer that you have a disability, so you will need to assess the job yourself to determine if it is right for you. If there are areas where you have difficulty, consider the accommodations you would need to be successful. You may be able to address your concern during the interview without actually disclosing your specific disability.

So when is the best time to disclose? There are advantages and disadvantages to disclosing regardless of the timing. Your decision will be based on **what you know about your own needs and abilities** and what you have learned about the organization and the specific job requirements. There are nine different places during the process that you may choose to disclose (or not):

TIMING OF DISCLOSURE	PROS	CONS
On your resume, cover letter or job application	Honesty/Peace of mind. Gets the issue out in the open from the start. Disabilities related to the position or organization may be seen as a plus.	You may be disqualified from the position before you have a chance to present your qualifications.
When an employer calls for an interview	For visible disabilities: Reduces the "shock factor" when you arrive for the interview, and addresses potential accessibility problems.	Although you have an interview, you may not receive serious consideration.
During the interview	Allows you to demonstrate your positive self-perception and address specific disability-related issues in person where discrimination is less likely.	Too much emphasis on your disability may indicate a possible problem. Employer may be distracted. You want to be evaluated on your abilities.
After the interview, before the offer	While you are being upfront with the interviewer, you have first had the opportunity to convince him/her of your abilities.	Employer may feel you waited too long. You may unknowingly be discriminated against.
Through a reference	Someone who knows you or has worked with you can give you a glowing recommendation. He/she may also discuss accommodation issues.	The person serving as your reference needs to be knowledgeable about your disability and how it relates to the position. Consider asking the person to write a reference letter and give him/her a draft.
After the offer, before acceptance	If the disability changes the hiring decision, you may have legal recourse.	Employer may feel you deceived him/her and this could cause distrust.
After you start work	Allows you to prove yourself on the job. If disclosure affects your employment status, you may have legal recourse as long as the condition doesn't affect your ability to perform your job.	Employers may accuse you of falsifying your application. You may have trouble deciding to whom you should disclose. Interactions with co-workers may change.
After a problem on the job	You have had the opportunity to prove yourself on the job first.	You may be perpetuating disability myths and misperceptions. It may be hard to re-establish trust with boss and co-workers. You may not have legal recourse if you are fired.
Never	If your disability has no impact on your ability to do the job, your employer may never have to know.	You run the risk of being fired if there is a problem and your disability is discovered. You may not have legal recourse if this happens.

If you decide to disclose ... It's a good idea to develop a "disclosure script" ahead of time so you can clearly articulate your specific disability and accommodation needs. **We strongly recommend that you discuss your thoughts with a Career Counselor or the Office of Disability Services.** Another resource is the "Special Interest Groups" area of The Career Center's web site.