



DALHOUSIE
UNIVERSITY

Able After Dal:

**Job & Career Supports for
Students With Disabilities**

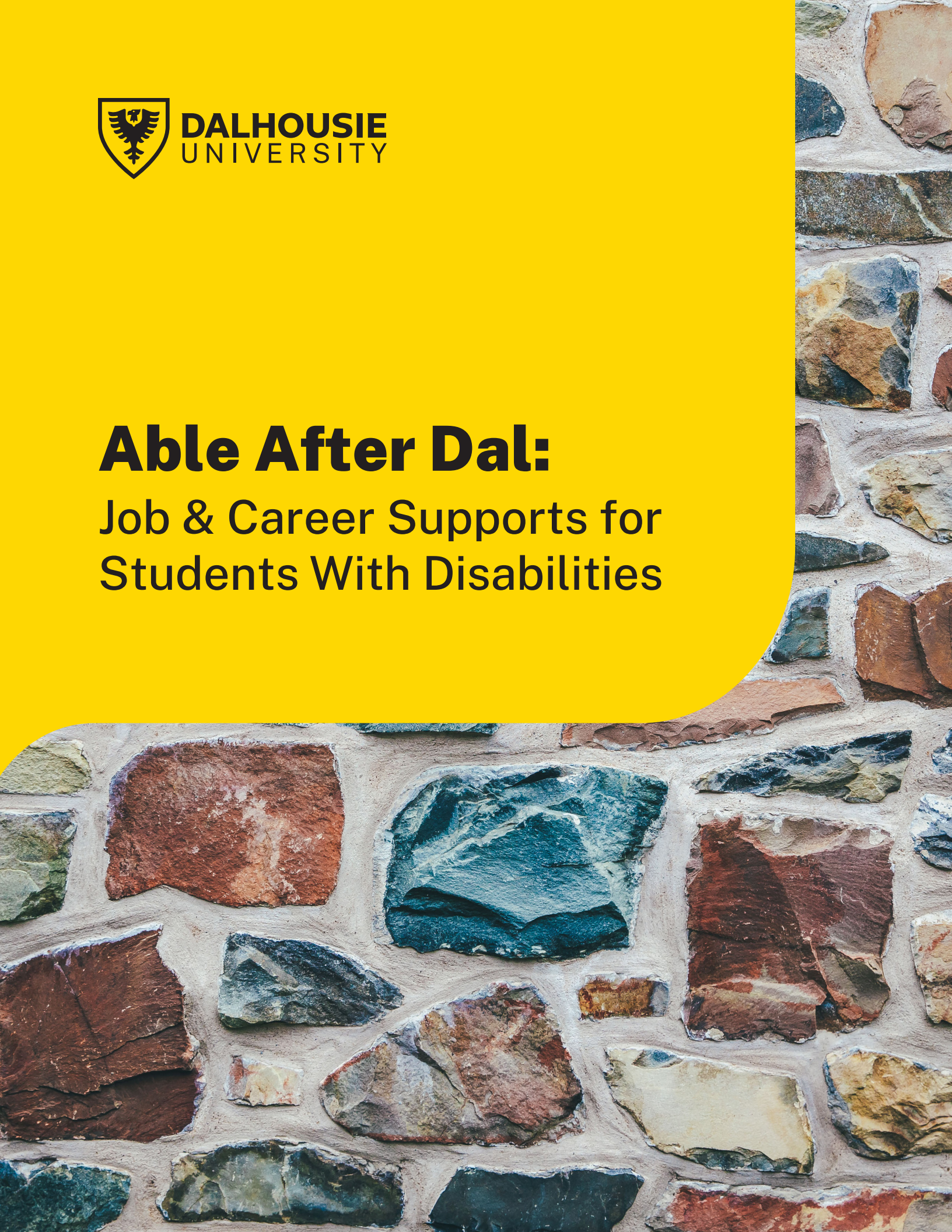


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Note: Words or terms with an asterisk are featured in the Accessibility Language Glossary at the back of this document



Able After Dal Introduction

Able After Dal supports students with disabilities at any stage on the path to employment. If you are a person with a disability, there may be unique experiences, strengths, and challenges that factor into navigating career and employment options.

Able After Dal offers a variety of resources including information about workplace rights and accommodations, opportunities to engage with inclusive employers, and connections with Student Access Advisors (dal.ca/access) and Career Services (dal.ca/careerservices) personnel (including a Career Advisor and Career Counsellor) who can support you in taking next steps towards your goals. Able After Dal supports students preparing for and exploring various types of employment, including:

- ▶ Post-graduation career opportunities
- ▶ Part-time jobs
- ▶ Summer employment
- ▶ Work-integrated learning (e.g. Co-op placements, internships, clinical placements)

This guide provides an overview of Able After Dal, and contains helpful tips, important information, and illustrative examples for students with disabilities at any stage on the path to employment, including the application stage, before/during an interview, accepting a job offer, and/or starting work. Topics that will be addressed include:

- ▶ Deciding About Disclosure
- ▶ Accommodations in the Workplace
- ▶ Knowing Your Rights
- ▶ Assessing Employer Accessibility



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Deciding About Disclosure

Disclosure is telling someone you have a disability and/or chronic health condition. It is often necessary to disclose when requesting changes to help reduce barriers you experience in your environment or in completing tasks or duties. These changes are called accommodations.

Disclosure is a complex personal decision that depends on the situation and your individual circumstances. If you can do the work without accommodation and your disability poses no risk to the safety of yourself or others, you are not legally required to disclose.

Apparent/Visible Disability

If your disability is **apparent/visible*** it may be observable when you meet with an employer in person, but it could also be observable during a virtual interview or when communicating by phone. Mentioning it as one aspect of your lived experience while using the disability-specific language you prefer can help set the tone when meeting a prospective employer.

Non-Apparent/Non-Visible Disability

If your disability is **non-apparent/non-visible*** and you need accommodation to perform your duties, it may be necessary to disclose at some point.

Why Disclose?

- ▶ So that you can bring your full authentic self to your work. Hiding part of who you are can have an adverse effect on your health and wellbeing.
- ▶ Receiving the required accommodations and other supports will help you successfully perform the tasks of the role and increase your satisfaction and comfort at work.
- ▶ It can help ensure accommodations are considered and set up for your arrival, supporting a smoother onboarding experience.

Questions to Consider When Deciding About Disclosure

- ▶ Is your disability apparent/visible or non-apparent/non-visible?
- ▶ Is it relevant to you doing the job?
- ▶ When do you feel most comfortable and confident disclosing your disability?
- ▶ Have you disclosed before? What was that experience like for you?
- ▶ Does the employer have a diversity statement or accessibility policy?
- ▶ Is the employer specifically seeking to recruit candidates with disabilities?
- ▶ Will you require accommodation to complete the job interview or do the work?
- ▶ What misconceptions might an employer have about your disability? How would you deal with that reaction?
- ▶ Does not disclosing put your safety or the safety of others at risk?

When Should You Disclose?

This chart may be helpful when considering this decision at different times during the job search process.

	Advantages	Disadvantages	Other Considerations
Disclosing on a resume or application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates openness • May allow you to be considered under an employment equity program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employer assumptions/biases may influence their decision • Limited opportunity to present yourself and your abilities or address employer concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider disclosing if the employer has an equity program and is recruiting persons with disabilities
Disclosing before an interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You know the employer is interested in you • If you require accommodation, allows you and employer to be better prepared 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employer assumptions/biases may influence their decision • No opportunity to present yourself or address concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you require accommodation for the interview, disclosure may be necessary
Disclosing during the interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduces risk of preconceived opinions, which allows you to address disability questions and highlight your skills/abilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may catch the employer off guard, lead them to focus on your disability, or make inappropriate assumptions influencing their decision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider disclosing if you are confident that you can keep the employer focused on your skills and abilities and are comfortable explaining your disability needs

Adapted from: "Disclosing your Disability: A Legal Guide for People with Disabilities in BC", Disability Alliance BC <http://q-r.to/DisclosingDisability> and "Job Seekers Guide for Students and Graduates with Disabilities", David C. Only Initiative, Carleton University <http://q-r.to/JobSeekersGuide>

	Advantages	Disadvantages	Other Considerations
Disclosing after receiving a job offer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows opportunity to discuss your needs and identify the best contact for accessibility requests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employer may feel you should have told them earlier, leading to distrust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may be nervous that your disability is not known or understood or that problems might be attributed to your disability
Disclosing after you start work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There's an opportunity to better understand job responsibilities and accommodation needs • You may have identified allies amongst your colleagues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may be nervous that your disability is not known or understood, or that problems might be attributed to your disability • Employer may feel you should have told them earlier, leading to distrust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you will experience stress by not disclosing or require accommodation, consider disclosing now. It can sometimes become harder if you wait longer
Disclosing after a problem arises at work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows you to prove yourself prior to disclosure • You may have the support of positive working relationships with colleagues/ manager 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employer may feel you should have told them earlier, leading to distrust • Could impact relationships with co-workers/manager 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be aware if job problems are related to disability. If so, address concerns as soon as possible and seek help from your support system
Never disclosing at any employment stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You won't have to explain disability or have others make assumptions about it • Avoid possible discrimination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If serious problems occur related to disability, employer may feel you should have told them earlier, leading to distrust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you require no accommodations and you are certain your disability will not be an issue for job performance, the issue of disclosure is less critical



Tips for Having a Disclosure Conversation

- ▶ Determine the appropriate person with whom to have this conversation (e.g. your manager, HR representative).
- ▶ Set a specific meeting time to ensure privacy and so that both you and your employer can come prepared.
- ▶ Create a script and practice with a friend or colleague. (See following page for more info)
- ▶ Approach it as a discussion and be open to different possibilities.
- ▶ Focus on what has worked for you in other places of employment. Remember, there are questions that employers do not have the legal right to ask, but they can ask how to best reduce the barriers you are experiencing.
- ▶ Highlight things you have learned and skills you have gained from managing a disability.
- ▶ List the accommodations you are requesting. Speak to how these accommodations will support your success.

Some Risks to Disclosing to Keep in Mind

- ▶ You may be impacted by unconscious bias or stigma.
- ▶ Your request may be denied.
- ▶ The accommodations you receive may not be the ones you need, and barriers remain.

If these or other negative experiences occur, consider discussing your concerns and options with your Dalhousie Access Advisor (dal.ca/access) or Career Advisor (dal.ca/careerservices), and/or bringing it to the attention of a relevant trusted staff member at your workplace. You may also wish to consult Human Rights and Equity Services. (dal.ca/hres)

Creating a Disclosure Script

Coming prepared for disclosure conversations can give you a sense of empowerment and boost confidence. But how do you decide what to say?

Start by considering the following:

- ▶ Describe your disability in simple terms, avoiding complex medical terminology. Whether you disclose a specific diagnosis is up to you, but it is not necessary.
- ▶ What are your skills and abilities that relate to the job responsibilities of the position for which you are applying?
- ▶ What challenges do you have, or barriers that you face, that are relevant to the position and performing certain duties?
- ▶ Have you used strategies or accommodations in the past that have helped reduce those barriers and overcome challenges?

After answering these questions, you can now develop a narrative script outlining how you will talk about your disability. Focus on your skills and frame your disability as an asset. Clearly note the barriers you experience as well as your needs, and remember to speak about limitations related only to the job.

Use This Example to Help Build Your Disclosure Script:

“I want to mention that I have a disability (if desired, you can include your preferred name for your disability). I know that my (list one or two of your strengths) will allow me to excel in this position. However, sometimes (indicate your barriers/limitations) might interfere with my ability to perform some of the tasks and duties outlined in this job description. In the past I have found that I can overcome this issue with (describe specific accommodations you need).”



Photo by Marcus Aurelius, sourced from pexels.com

Accommodations in the Workplace

Accommodations are adjustments that reduce or remove barriers to ensure fair and equitable access. In the workplace, this could include adjustments or changes so that an employee can participate fully and meet occupational requirements. It is your right to access accommodations in the workplace, a right that is federally, provincially and territorially protected. This right extends up until the point of **undue hardship*** whereby an employer can prove an accommodation would require significant difficulty or expense.

Because each employee and each workplace are unique, an accommodation or the combinations of accommodations needs to be personalized and contextualized. Often, the identification and introduction of accommodations are co-created between the employee and employer.

Examples of Accommodations

- ▶ Choice of preferred interview style (for a job interview)
- ▶ Interview questions provided in advance (for a job interview)
- ▶ Noise-cancelling headphones
- ▶ Flexible work hours
- ▶ Ability to work from home
- ▶ Text-to-speech software
- ▶ Large-print materials
- ▶ Written instructions
- ▶ Environmental modifications (e.g. supportive seating, lighting, and noise adjustments)

Visit the Job Accommodation Network (askjan.org) to learn more about different kinds of accommodations and practical suggestions for requesting and negotiating accommodations with an employer.

Reflection Prompts:

- ▶ Provide an example of another workplace accommodation. What barrier(s) does that accommodation reduce or remove?
- ▶ Have you ever benefitted from an accommodation? If so, reflect on the impact of that accommodation.

How Do I Know If I Need Accommodations in the Workplace?

Need for accommodations may change as an employee moves through their working life, influenced by factors that include changes in role, responsibility, organization, and ability. Employees should frequently assess whether current accommodations are meeting their needs and whether additional, modified accommodations are needed in the short- or long-term.

To Help Determine Changing Needs, Employees Can Consider:

- ▶ What barrier or barriers could negatively impact my ability to fully participate in the workplace?
- ▶ What accommodations have enabled me to fully participate in similar contexts and roles?

If a barrier or barriers are identified, employees should consider whether the barrier or barriers they are experiencing are related to disability. If related to disability (which is a protected human right), it is your right to access accommodations to ensure fair and equitable access.

The Pathway to Obtain an Accommodation

Identify a need for accommodations

Make accommodation needs known to the employer, preferably in writing

Answer questions related to barriers

Suggest and discuss potential accommodations with the employer

Collaborate with experts, if needed

Implement accommodations

Work with employer to reflect on the impact(s) of the accommodation

Contact an Access Advisor (dal.ca/access) and/or Career Advisor (dal.ca/careerservices) for 1:1 advising with respect to requesting accommodations in co-op placement, internships, and clinical placements, as well as at any stage in the career development and job search process.

Step Five: Make your Immediate Goal SMART

Time to get moving! You've identified your Ultimate Goal. Now you need to select an Immediate Goal.

To start, pick one of the Possible Actions you defined on the last page. *Example and ideas to*

Now make it SMART: Specific, My Own Action

- > **S**pecific. If life has been difficult lately, your goal may be weaker than usual. Do you know how you are going to swim at the public swim times? Do you know when the public swim times are? Be as clear as you can.
- > **M**y Own. Is it your own goal or someone else's? If you are hoping to carry out your goal, your goal should depend on your own actions. For example, "Go to a movie with Frank" depends on Frank being available and willing to go. A better goal would be "Go to a movie and invite Frank to a movie," because giving the invitation is under your control.
- > **A**ction-Oriented. Your goal should be to DO something, not to feel a certain way while you are doing it. This is because your actions are under your control. For example, "Go for a 10-minute walk" is better than "Feel good about going for a walk." Goals should have to do with your actions. If you do the right things, you will probably change for the better.
- > **R**ealistic. You must have a clear and achievable finish line. If you feel discouraged or stuck recently, you might be tempted to set an outcome as a failure. One participant in this program swam for 14 years and completed fourteen laps of the pool – but missed the finish line that you already know you can reach. If you're not comfortable with a bigger goal, make it smaller. Once you have achieved it, you can set a bigger goal next time. The point is not to set a goal that is out of your reach.

Know Your Rights

There are laws and programs to protect your inherent right to be treated fairly in workplaces and to be free from discrimination. Your rights are protected federally ([q-r.to/FederallyProtectedRights](#)) (e.g., Canadian Human Rights Act, Employment Equity Act, Canada Labour Code, Rights for Foreign Workers, Occupational Health and Safety Act), as well as provincially and territorially ([q-r.to/Workers-Rights](#)). Understanding your rights can help ensure you're treated fairly throughout your working life, including within the job search and hiring processes.

Your Rights in a Canadian Job Search

There are various ways to search for a job, including identifying and applying for jobs through the visible (e.g. job boards) and hidden (e.g. networking) job markets. Your rights to respectful and fair treatment remains regardless of the method(s) in which you engage with the job search.

Rights and protections in a Canadian job search include:

- ▶ Offers of work must meet provincial minimum standard working conditions, including standards for wages, hours of work, overtime, vacation, and other terms.
- ▶ Fee-free job applications, as a candidate cannot be charged to engage in a hiring process or for information about employers who are offering work.



Your Rights in a Canadian Job Interview

Interviews are common in hiring processes, serving key functions for both the applicant and the interviewer(s). Interviews provide the applicant with an opportunity to learn more about the role, and the interviewer(s) has the opportunity to determine if you possess the skills, qualities, and experiences needed to be successful in the role.

As an applicant, your right to respectful and fair treatment extends to (and beyond) the job interview. Rights and protections in a Canadian job interview include:

- ▶ Interviewers' duty to accommodate applicants, including providing alternative arrangements, to ensure candidates can participate fully in the interview.
- ▶ Interviewers cannot ask candidates to provide significant personal information (e.g. age, medical history, marital status, sexual orientation, disability) beyond that which may be justifiably needed to perform essential job requirements (e.g. ability to carry a box of a certain weight, if a part of core duties).
- ▶ Candidates' privacy should always be respected, including when collecting applicant information during the interview and obtaining informed consent, including purpose and scope, if background checks are part of the hiring process.

Your Rights in a Canadian Workplace

Take the time to learn about your workplace rights before beginning your new job. Doing so will give you a better sense of the laws and protections that defend your right to be treated fairly in workplaces and to be free from discrimination.

Rights and protections in a Canadian workplace include:

- ▶ Employer's duty to accommodate employees in such ways to prevent or reduce discrimination. This may include changes in work environments and/or duties to make it possible for an employee to fully participate in their role and associated duties.
- ▶ Employees' right to be safe on the job, including the right to know what hazards are present in the workplace, the right to participate in keeping your workplace healthy and safe, and the right to refuse work that you believe to be dangerous to yourself or your co-workers.

Assessing Employer Accessibility

Things to Look for When Researching Prospective Employers

1. Assess the language in the job posting

- ▶ Is there a statement regarding a commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility?
- ▶ Is inclusive language used in all sections of the posting?
- ▶ Does the employer specify they encourage equity-deserving candidates to apply?
- ▶ Are accommodations mentioned as available throughout the application process?

2. Look at their recruitment practices

- ▶ What kind of events are they hosting? How inclusive are they?
- ▶ Are they attending recruitment events targeted to or run by people with disabilities?
- ▶ Are they promoting their opportunities in partnership with disability community-relevant organizations, websites, or publications?

3. Get a sense of the workplace culture

- ▶ An organization's website reveals a lot about its values, priorities, and practices.
- ▶ Do they use inclusive language throughout?
- ▶ Are the images they use reflective of diverse populations?
- ▶ Are equity, diversity, inclusion, and access highlighted in vision and mission statements, strategic plans, annual reports, or staff bios?
- ▶ Do they mention **Universal Design*** values and practices?
- ▶ If you have the opportunity, speak with people who have interview or work history with that company about their experiences.

Resources on Inclusive Employment

- ▶ **Career Edge**
careeredge.ca
Offers access to meaningful paid internships in a wide range of fields.
- ▶ **DiscoverAbility Network**
discoverability.network
(Ontario-based)
Online platform that matches job seekers with disabilities with employers looking for skilled candidates or internship opportunities.
- ▶ **Lime Connect**
limeconnect.com
Lime Connect offers scholarships, mentorship programs, leadership building opportunities, and recruitment events for young professionals and university students with disabilities.
- ▶ **Job Accommodation Network (JAN)**
askjan.org
Helps individuals with disabilities explore accommodation ideas and provides practical suggestions for requesting and negotiating accommodations with an employer.
- ▶ **Canada's Top 100 Diversity Employers**
canadastop100/diversity
An annually compiled list of top employers in Canada with respect to diversity and inclusiveness.
- ▶ **Federally regulated industries and Crown corporations**
q-r.to/regulatedindustries
q-r.to/crowncorporations
These organizations are likely to have positive equity hiring practices, as are provincial government departments.



Mohammad's Story — Requesting Interview Accommodations

Mohammad is eager to apply the knowledge they are gaining from their political science degree to the workplace. They have been applying to several summer jobs that focus on policy analysis or community engagement. Mohammad finds out that they are selected to interview for a Student Community Liaison Coordinator position for a local non-profit. The interview will be in-person at the non-profit's main office, which Mohammad has never visited before. As someone with cerebral palsy that uses a power wheelchair, Mohammad knows there may be barriers to accessing the interview space. If they cannot access the interview space, Mohammad fears they won't be able to attend the interview, let alone be offered the Student Community Liaison Coordinator role.

Recognizing that interviewers have a duty to accommodate applicants, Mohammad contacts the organization via email. Mohammad expresses their enthusiasm for being invited to interview for the Student Community Liaison Coordinator role and chooses to share that they are a power wheelchair user. To attend the in-person interview, Mohammad says they would need to ensure that the space was accessible to them and lists examples of accessibility features they require.

When Mohammad receives a response, it is confirmed that the in-person interview space is accessible. It turns out that the local non-profit recently underwent renovations to reduce pre-existing physical barriers in their space. Knowing that the space is accessible, Mohammad is feeling more excited for the interview.

Reflection Prompts:

- ▶ Have you faced a similar access barrier to Mohammad? If so, what did you do and what was the outcome?
- ▶ What are some of your key takeaways from Mohammad's story?

Photo by Tima Miroshnichenko, sourced from pexels.com



Cynthia, Raven, and Aroon's Story — Fielding Illegal Interview Questions

Cynthia, Raven, and Aroon do not know one another but are all excited about upcoming interviews. Cynthia is enthusiastic about the possibility of working in a local municipality, Raven can't wait to learn if they will get a coveted space in an entrepreneurship hub, and Aroon hopes to get a flexible job as a park attendant. The day arrives for their respective interviews, and the interviewers ask the same question to each interviewee:

“Do you have any disabilities or medical conditions?”

After hearing this question in their respective interviews, Cynthia, Raven, and Aroon pause. Regardless of the interviewer's motivations behind the question, they all know that the interviewer is asking significant personal information, which is prohibited and illegal. Cynthia's, Raven's, and Aroon's responses are below:

Cynthia chooses to answer the question but is careful about not revealing certain specifics:

“In past roles, I have found it helpful for my employers to know I have dyslexia. In my case, that means that I use assistive technologies to help ensure my spelling is accurate and written communication is clear. Having dyslexia has contributed to my strengths related to narrative reasoning, complex problem solving, and big-picture thinking.”

Raven chooses to answer the question that the employer should have asked: “When reflecting on the question, I surmise you are interested in knowing whether I can be depended on to complete entrepreneurship hub duties. You will be pleased to know that I am very dependable. In my last role working at a Garden Centre, I was often awarded employee of the month during my three-year tenure. In my last year in the role, the Centre's owners made me a keyholder and promoted me to the role of Manager. As a Manager, I oversaw scheduling, maintaining service standards, and meeting monthly deadlines for plant orders.”

Aroon chooses not to answer the question: “Although excited for this role and for this interview, the question is asking me about a protected characteristic. Instead, I would be very happy to discuss the job, its duties, and my ability to carry out those duties.”

Reflection Prompts:

- ▶ What do you think about Cynthia's, Raven's, and Aroon's responses?
- ▶ If this situation occurs during your interview, do you think you would respond similarly to Cynthia, Raven, or Aroon?
- ▶ Have you ever been posed a similar question in an interview? If so, how did it feel? How did you respond and what was the outcome?

Accessibility Glossary

Ableism: A belief system, analogous to racism, sexism, or ageism, that privileges non-disabled people and sees persons with disabilities as being less worthy of respect and consideration, less able to contribute and participate, or of less inherent value than others. Ableism may be conscious or unconscious, and may be embedded in institutions, systems, or the broader culture of a society. It can limit the opportunities of persons with disabilities and reduce their inclusion in the life of their communities.

Accessibility: Elements that influence a person's ability to access and function within an environment.

Access barriers: Elements that hinder a person's ability to fully and equally participate. Access barriers, at times referred to as 'barriers', can include elements that hinder on a physical, architectural, technological, and/or attitudinal basis.

Accommodation: Alteration that prevents, reduces, or removes access barriers to ensure a person's fair and equitable participation.

Disability: An impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication, or sensory impairment, or a functional limitation whether permanent, temporary, or episodic in nature, evident or not, that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders a person's full and equal participation in society.

Apparent or visible disability: One that has any apparent/visible indicator that a person has a disability. This may include an assistive device, a physical characteristic, or a way of communicating. Persons with apparent/visible disabilities may also have non-apparent/non-visible disabilities.

Non-apparent or non-visible disability: One that does not have any apparent/visible indicators that a person has a disability. This includes disabilities related to mental health, learning and attention issues, some physical disabilities, some chronic health conditions, low vision, or hearing loss. Non-apparent/non-visible disabilities can sometimes become apparent/visible, and persons with non-apparent/non-visible disabilities may also have apparent/visible disabilities.

Stigma: Negative attitudes, beliefs, or behaviours about or towards a group of people because of a particular characteristic or situation in life. It includes discrimination, prejudice, judgement, and stereotypes.

Undue hardship: Occurs when an employer can prove with sufficient evidence that an accommodation would cause a substantial and unmanageable workplace burden.

Universal Design: Design of products and environments to be usable by the greatest number of people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for accommodations.

Definitions sourced from the Canadian Institute of Health Research, http://q-r.to/CIHR_Glossary, The Accessible Canada Act (2019) <http://q-r.to/AccessibleCanadaAct>, The Nova Scotia Public Service Commission <http://q-r.to/Duty-to-Accommodate>, the Dalhousie Accessibility website <http://q-r.to/Dal-Accommodations>, The Government of Canada <http://q-r.to/Why-Words-Matter>, and Law Commission of Ontario <http://q-r.to/Introducing-the-Framework>



Contacts and Support

If you have any questions, please contact us:

Student Accessibility Centre (dal.ca/access)

902-494-2836

access@dal.ca

Career Services (Bissett Student Success Centre) (dal.ca/careerservices)

902-494-3077

career.services@dal.ca



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