



At a Job Interview

Job interviews are an evaluation process for employers to determine who the best applicant is for the job. It is important for all applicants to prepare themselves for the evaluation process.

There are a number of different interview methods that employers use. These are often based on the personal choice of the interviewer(s), the preferred method adopted by the organisation, the cost to implement the interview, legal and administrative requirements and/or the desire to use new interview methods. The types of interviews include:

- informal interviews. This is often used as the first step in the interview process to allow the employer to get to know the applicant. Points are often prepared by the employer to stimulate discussion and obtain information to assist in determining whether the applicant should proceed to the next step in the application process
- telephone interviews. This method is often used by smaller organisations or by organisations that wish to shortlist the number of applicants prior to interview. This style of interview can be a difficult process due to the inability to read the interviewer's response to answers given and has inherent obstacles for applicants with a disability such as hearing impairment
- interviews via video link. This method is often used when applicants are unavailable to attend an interview in person. Video links can be a difficult process as the applicant cannot see the interviewer and therefore is unable to read the interviewer's response to answers given. Applicants can also become distracted by their own image on the screen
- one-on-one interviews. One interviewer conducts the interview, such as the manager, human resources representative or the owner of the organisation. This may be an informal or formal interview
- two-on-one interviews. Two interviewers are involved in asking questions to the applicant. This method enables a level of objectivity to occur as it allows discussion to occur to determine the best applicant for the position
- behaviour-based Interviews. Questions are presented to enable the applicant to provide specific examples of their experiences. This assists the interviewer in determining whether the inherent requirements of the position can be met
- panel Interviews. Employers commonly use this method. The panel often involves three or more interviewers, with at least one member acting as an 'Independent' to ensure equitable practices are implemented and to provide an external perspective .
- Applicants should investigate what method of interview will be used in order to prepare for the process. Consideration needs to be taken as to how to present information at the interview and how questions should be answered. The [Gradlink website](#) is an example of a resource that can greatly assist applicants in obtaining information about interviews and interview processes.

Disclosure Of Disability at a Job Interview

Applicants who have a disability may also need to consider their options about disclosing a disability in the job interview.

For applicants with an obvious disability, disclosure at an interview is inevitable. The issue is therefore not 'should disclosure occur' but how disclosure is addressed and managed in the interview to ensure an effective outcome.

For applicants with a hidden disability, the personal choice to disclose a disability can be made at the interview, when a job offer has been made, when employed in the position or not at all. If an applicant with a hidden disability chooses to disclose in an interview, consideration needs to be given as to how disclosure should be addressed and managed to ensure an effective outcome.



Why Applicants May Choose To Disclose At A Job Interview

Renee has been notified of an interview time for a position which involves working with people with disabilities. Renee has decided to disclose her disability in the interview, as a means of demonstrating her understanding of disability issues and ability to work with people with a range of needs.

Applicants may choose to disclose their disability at a job interview to:

- reflect on their life experiences which may be relevant to the position
- demonstrate its relevance to the position of employment
- demonstrate personal qualities, abilities, problem solving skills and other work based skills that may have been developed as a consequence of the applicants disability
- provide specific information about their disability to dispel any mistaken or stereotyped views about their ability to perform in the job
- provide information about their disability and how they manage it in their daily life and workplace
- explain their disability, how it may affect them in the job and possible work related adjustments to overcome any limitations
- describe how they would undertake the inherent requirements of the position
- identify any work related adjustments requirements that the applicant may deem as essential and how these had been achieved in previous employment, education and/or other experiences
- reduce the possibility of the interviewers becoming distracted by their disability and to focus on the applicant's ability to do the job.

Why Applicants May Choose NOT To Disclose Their Disability At A Job Interview

Although Josette is aware that she will require some minor work related adjustments if she is the successful applicant for the position as dental hygienist, she has decided not to disclose her disability or to negotiate for those adjustments, until she is offered a position. Josette believes that to raise her disability at the time of interview, may simply become a distraction, detracting from the real purpose of the interview, to demonstrate her skills and knowledge.

Applicants may choose NOT to disclose their disability at a job interview because:

- it may not be appropriate or relevant when demonstrating their ability to perform in the job
- the information may be perceived in a negative or discriminatory manner
- the interview panel may focus on the applicant's disability, not on their abilities
- the disability has no effect or impact on the applicant's ability to meet the inherent requirements of the job.
- the applicant may not require work related adjustments in the job
- The applicant's disability may be in remission and therefore not considered relevant to the interview process.



What To Disclose?

Applicants need to be prepared about how they would like to disclose their disability at the job interview. It is important that the information presented is clear and concise and relevant to the interview process. Very often it is not essential to disclose in-depth medical or personal information about a disability.

The type of information that an applicant may present about their disability to the interview panel may include:

- what the disability is
- why they have chosen to disclose their disability
- how the disability and life experiences may positively impact on the position
- management strategies to effectively work in the position
- the type of work related adjustments that may be required in the job.

How disability information may be presented at the interview:

- applicants with an obvious disability who choose to disclose at the interview, should consider disclosing at the beginning of the interview. This often prevents the interview panel from becoming distracted about the nature of the applicant's disability
- applicants with a hidden disability who choose to disclose at the interview, should plan to disclose in a positive way. Describe the disability, how it may impact on the job, the work related adjustments, and how these may have been achieved in previous employment, education and/or other experiences
- try to explain the disability, how it was acquired and how this may relate to the requirements of the job. A direct approach may allow the interview panel to concentrate on the applicants' answers and on their ability to do the job
- use achievements and experiences that relate to the disability to demonstrate acquired skills such as problem solving skills, negotiation skills, organisational ability and other work-based skills
- develop a plan to discuss work related adjustments required. Reflect on previous jobs, experiences in the education environment and other personal experiences that demonstrate capabilities and work related adjustments negotiated to meet the inherent requirements of the job.
- provide information about possible work related adjustments and the advantages in enhancing the applicants' ability to achieve the requirements of the job.

To Whom Should The Applicant Disclose?

If an applicant wishes to disclose their disability in a job interview, it is to be directed to the interview panel. If an applicant has disclosed their disability in their application letter or prior to the interview, it is important to follow through with this information at the job interview.

It is the responsibility of the interview panel to ensure that any personal information is kept private and confidential and that this information does not negatively impact on the interview process.



The Purpose Of Disclosure

The main purpose of disclosing a disability in an interview is to:

- demonstrate how the applicant's disability is relevant to the position (if the position is specifically targeting a person with a disability)
- dispel any mistaken or stereotyped views about the applicant's ability to perform in the job
- demonstrate that the applicant can meet the inherent requirements of the position
- highlight the need for work related adjustments.

It is essential that applicant's state their purpose in disclosing. This ensures that disclosure can achieve a beneficial outcome.

Disclosure is most effective when the applicant is

"...knowledgeable about their disability and (is) able to articulate both their disability-related needs and their (skills)." (1)

It is not usually necessary to provide a detailed account of the disability or medical condition in a job interview, but what is most helpful is being able to provide a clear statement of how the disability impacts on the applicant's capacity to work and what specific support would be required.

Applicants: Rights And Responsibilities When Applicants Disclose Their Disability In The Job Interview

Applicants have a right to:

- a fair and equitable interview process that focuses on the applicant's abilities and any possible work related adjustments to meet the inherent requirements of the job
- have information about their disability treated confidentially and respectfully
- appropriate and respectful questioning of their disability for the purpose of identifying their ability to meet the requirements of the position and any work related adjustments required
- have information about their disability used by the interview panel only for the purposes of determining their merit in meeting the inherent requirements of the job
- appropriate adjustments and support in the job interview, to enable them to effectively demonstrate their skills and abilities in the interview
- discuss work related adjustments in a job interview to demonstrate their ability to meet the inherent requirements of the position.

Applicants are Responsible for:

- discussing with the prospective employer, convener of the interview panel or a member of the interview panel any disability specific requirements needed for the interview
- informing the manager/convener/panel in a timely manner about the need for reasonable adjustments in the interview
- identifying appropriate and reasonable work related adjustments with the interview panel when negotiating possible adjustments in the job
- **negotiating** the type of work related adjustments with the employer. Work related adjustments are subject to negotiation with the employer to identify the most appropriate adjustments for the work environment.



Interview Panel: Role And Responsibilities When Applicants Disclose Their Disability In The Job Interview

It is the role of the Convener of the panel or person conducting the interview process to:

- treat all applicants, including applicant's with a disability, with respect and dignity
- focus on each applicant's skills and abilities to determine their merit in meeting the inherent requirements of the job
- focus on the applicant's abilities, not on their appearance, disability or other unassociated issues
- conduct the interview process in the same manner for all applicants
- assess the applicants ability to meet the inherent requirements of the position, including the type of work related adjustments that may be required to meet the inherent requirements.

Responsibilities:

1. Appropriate Language And Actions

When interviewing an applicant with a disability, the use of appropriate language and actions ensures that the applicant is treated in a respectful and dignified manner.

Language:

When referring to a person with a disability, it is important to refer to the person first **before** the disability i.e:

- person with a disability not disabled or handicapped person
- person who is deaf or hearing impaired not deaf and dumb person
- person with an intellectual disability not intellectually disabled person.

Don't use words with negative, derogatory or patronising connotations such as: 'courageous', 'handicapped', 'special', 'poor unfortunate victim', 'cripple', 'deaf mute', 'deaf and dumb', 'deformed', 'invalid', 'lame', 'arthritic', 'epileptic', 'spastic', 'spaz', 'schitzo', 'mental', 'retard', 'retarded', 'afflicted', 'withered', 'stricken', 'wheelchair-bound', 'wheelie' or 'confined to a wheelchair'(2).

Actions:

Below is an excerpt from the Resource **Employ Able, Employing People with a Disability in the NSW Public Sector**, that outlines some suggested strategies in using appropriate actions when interviewing applicants with a disability(3) :

- use a normal tone of voice when extending a welcome. Do not raise your voice unless requested to do so.
- shake hands even if the person has limited hand use or wears an artificial limb. A left-hand shake is acceptable. If the person cannot shake hands, welcome them and acknowledge their presence.
- look and speak directly to the person rather than through a companion or aide whom the person may have with them
- if an interpreter is present, speak to the person, not the interpreter, and maintain eye contact with them
- offer assistance with dignity and respect. Be prepared to have the offer declined, or if it is accepted, to listen to or accept instructions
- offer a person with a visual impairment your arm (at or about the elbow). This enables you to guide them rather than to propel them



- offer hold or carry packages in a respectful manner such as “May I help you with your packages?”
- assume the person is of normal intelligence - less than one third of people with a disability have a learning disability
- don't be embarrassed if you slip up with common expressions like 'See you later' or 'Got to be running along' and then realise that what you have said relates to the person's disability
- never pretend to understand if you are having difficulty doing so - ask for clarification. Don't feel embarrassed if you are having difficulty understanding an applicant with a speech impairment; it is unlikely to be news to them that they are sometimes difficult to understand
- keep the relationship on an equal footing by referring to 'people without a disability' rather than 'normal' people (3).

Don't:

- offer to assist a person unless the individual requests your assistance
- patronise people using wheelchairs by patting them on the head or shoulder, or pushing their chair unless requested
- lean on a person's wheelchair. Their chair is their space and it belongs to them
- touch the person in overly familiar ways unless you are familiar with them.

2. Interview Questions

It is the responsibility of the interview panel to ask appropriate questions to applicants, most importantly to applicants with a disability. The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1992 permits disability specific questions to be asked in an interview for the purposes of identifying:

- whether the applicant can perform the inherent job requirements and
- any reasonable adjustments required to meet the inherent requirements of the job.

'Actions, which are reasonably intended to provide equal opportunity to people with a disability, are permitted under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) (section 45). These may include inquiries, examinations or actions which are reasonably intended to identify reasonable adjustment required in the workplace' (4).

Appropriate Questions:

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) does not set out specific words that are considered appropriate or not. Whether a question is considered lawful is dependent on whether it is for a legitimate purpose and the question is a means of achieving that purpose.

If it appears the person's disability may inhibit their performance in a job, an interview panel may investigate with the applicant:

- how they would perform the job
- what types of work related adjustments might they need to enable them to successfully meet the requirements of the job.



The interview panel should outline the **intent** and **purpose** for the request for disability specific information from an applicant, to reduce misunderstandings, which might lead to fears of discrimination.

E.g. An interview panel initiated discussion with Moira about her physical disability and possible limitations in the work environment. The intention of the interview panel was to identify work related adjustments specific to Moira's needs. The interview panel had not made their intentions clear to Moira, who felt that the panel were inappropriately questioning her about her disability.

Language needs to focus on the person's abilities, not their disability e.g. 'Will you need workplace adjustments to do this task?' NOT "Can you do this task?'

Inappropriate Questions:

It is considered unlawful for an interview panel to:

- ask discriminatory questions,
- ask personal or inappropriate questions that would not be asked of a person without a disability (this does not preclude the panel from discussing with the applicant if and how their disability would impact on the inherent requirements of the job and the type of work related adjustments required) and to
- ask for unjustified requests for information that are not reasonably intended as a means of identifying necessary work related adjustments.

Inappropriate questions may include:

- how an applicant acquired their disability
- asking specific information about the applicant's disability rather than discussing possible work related

adjustments in the job. Inappropriate questions about an applicant's disability may lead to, or constitute, discrimination. Concerns in this area include:

- the potential of inappropriate questioning or examinations to cause humiliation and to distract both employer and potential employee from the real business of establishing effectively whether and how a person can do the job and whether he or she is the best person for the job
- the potential for disability related information to be used as the basis for discriminatory decisions, without sufficient interaction between the employer and the person with a disability to deal with concerns which the employer may have about the disability
- potential disclosure of sensitive personal information regarding a person's disability to other employees or third parties or failure to protect such information from unauthorised access' (5). Routine or standard disability questions in an interview may exclude or disadvantage an applicant with a disability. If a question has this effect, it may be seen as indirect discrimination.

E.g. A standard question "have you ever had a mental illness?" was used by an interview panel for all applicants that were being interviewed for a Librarian position. Although this question was presented to all applicants, Barry who has a psychiatric disability felt targeted and excluded in the interview and therefore felt unable to successfully demonstrate his ability to meet the inherent requirements of the job. This form of questioning is considered to be indirect discrimination.



3. Selection Process

An interview panel is required to focus on and assess the merit of each applicant in their ability to meet the inherent requirements of the job. It is not appropriate for the interview panel to focus and assess an applicant's disability. E.g. a well-qualified accountant with a speech impairment - the impairment is not necessarily a barrier to the ability to perform as an accountant (6).

After interviewing, the panel should make a selection based on how well the person meets the selection criteria in the job description. The panel should also:

- consult with the applicant regarding any work-related adjustments they may need. **Negotiate** the type of work related adjustments with the employee. Work related adjustments need to be negotiated with the employee to identify the most appropriate adjustments for the work environment.
- determine if there are any identified health risks among the inherent requirements for the particular job, and
- discuss these matters with the applicant before deciding on the type of health assessment (7).

If an applicant with a disability is successful in gaining the position of employment it should be due to:

- the applicant's ability to demonstrate, on merit, their ability to do the job
- the applicant's ability to meet the inherent requirements of the job
- the applicant is the most competitive applicant for the job
- the applicant's requirements for work-related adjustments that are within acceptable limits
- the secondary benefit to the agency is that, by employing people with a disability, the agency reflects a diversity of staff and a commitment to equitable working practices.

If an applicant with a disability is not successful in gaining the position of employment it should be due to:

- the applicant's inability to meet the inherent requirements of the job, with work place adjustments, as completely as another applicant, or
- the applicant's inability to safely meet the inherent requirements of the job, even with work place adjustments or
- the work related adjustments needed for the applicant to meet the inherent requirements of the job would cause unjustifiable hardship to the agency

For further information about the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, refer to the Disability Discrimination Act document in this Resource or the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission website at <http://www.hreoc.gov.au/>

4. Privacy And Confidentiality

State and federal privacy legislation require organisation's to protect all confidential personal information, including information about an applicant's disability. It is appropriate for an interview panel to inform applicants with a disability about the organisations procedures in the collection, use and protection of all confidential material.

Implementation of privacy requirements by organisations can promote positive disclosure by an applicant with a disability in an interview with the aim of openly discussing disability related issues and strategies in the workplace.

For further information about the Federal and State Privacy Acts, refer to the Privacy and Confidentiality document in this Resource or the Privacy Act website at www.privacy.gov.au



5. Occupational Health and Safety

Assessment of the possible risks of an applicant with a disability in relation to occupational health and safety should not be taken into consideration in a job interview unless:

- reasonable occupational health and safety standards are accepted as being among the inherent requirements of the job. If the applicant is able to meet the inherent requirements of the position, possibly with work related adjustments, then they should be considered as a possible candidate for the position employment. **All** applicants, including applicants with a disability, should be assessed in accordance with the inherent requirements of the position.
- it is used to identify work related adjustments for the individual to meet the inherent requirements of the position. In determining whether a person can perform the inherent requirements of a job, the interview panel is required to consider whether the person could perform these requirements if some adjustment is made, including adjustments to facilities, equipment, work practices or training. If such an adjustment would be effective it must be made, unless it would impose unjustifiable hardship on the employer or other affected parties.

When assessing occupational health and safety in the workplace, adjustments may involve changes to make work safer for all employees. For example, safer manual handling practices, or substitutes for manual handling, make work safer for all employees as well as removing some barriers to workers with pre-existing injuries or disabilities. Other adjustments might address more specifically the needs of workers with a disability.

Footnotes

(1) Scholl & Mooney, Undated Draft Document, Disclosure in work based learning programs

<http://www.cew.wisc.edu/ya/pdf/brief3.pdf>

(2) Jenkin, P (2003) Employ Able, Employing People with a Disability in the NSW Public Sector, Section 4 Interview Skills pg 63

(3) Jenkin, P (2003) Employ Able, Employing People with a Disability in the NSW Public Sector, Section 4 Interview Skills pg 63-64

(4) Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (2003) Frequently Asked Questions: Employment,

http://www.hreoc.gov.au/disability_rights/faq/Employment/employment_faq_1.html

(5) Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (2003) Frequently Asked Questions: Employment,

http://www.hreoc.gov.au/disability_rights/FAQ/Employment/employment_faq_1.html

(6) Australian National University, (1999) Disability in the Workplace, A Guide for Employees with a Disability, Their Supervisors and Colleagues, The Selection Process

http://www.anu.edu.au/disabilities/resources_for_staff/disability_in_workplace.php

(7) Jenkin, P (2003) Employ Able, Employing People with a Disability in the NSW Public Sector, Section 4 Interview Skills pg 72