

Students with Dyslexia

If you have dyslexia, you are not alone. It is thought that 10% of the population shows signs of dyslexia with around 4% affected severely. When applying for jobs the following information should be considered:

The law

The updated 1995 Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) was originally introduced to protect people with disabilities from discrimination. It defines a disability as being any health condition that has 'a substantial and long-term adverse effect on [your] ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities'.

Part 2 of the Act makes it unlawful for an employer to discriminate against a disabled person in two main ways. Firstly, an employer must not treat a disabled person less favourably for a reason related to his/her disability. Secondly, when you apply for or do a job, the employer must make any 'reasonable adjustments' needed for you to perform to the best of your ability and to ensure that you are not treated less favourably than other people.

Many reasonable adjustments are neither expensive nor complicated eg giving you verbal rather than written instructions in a quiet location, allowing extra time for written work, or providing you with assistive software. If there are any additional costs, you can apply for funding through the government's Access to Work scheme. http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/Employmentsupport/WorkSchemesAndProgrammes/DG_4000347

If you feel you have been discriminated against, seek advice from the Disability Law Service (www.dls.org.uk) or contact Skill, The National Bureau for Students with Disabilities, for further advice (see references below).

Choosing an employer

Increasingly, employers are recognising the values of diversity in the workforce and are actively recruiting a workforce which includes those who are disabled in some way. In addition, the Disability Equality Duty, effective from December 2006, requires employers to show that they are being pro-active in assisting disabled applicants and employees to progress and succeed within their organisation.

You should expect all employers to recruit positively and there are ways to identify employers who are active in this context. The following factors indicate that the organisation is disability-friendly:

1. Does the website or company literature include a policy statement on equal opportunities or profiles of employees with a disability?
2. Do application forms explain the employer's commitment to equal opportunities and encourage candidates to declare a disability? An employer may demonstrate their commitment to equal opportunities by, for instance, making application forms accessible and available in alternative formats. Another example would be asking you about any adjustment they can make that will allow you to perform to the best of your ability, during the recruitment process or in the workplace.
3. Is the company a member of the Employers' Forum on Disability (www.efd.org.uk/)? This is made up of nearly 400 employers and aims to develop best practice in the recruitment, retention and development of disabled people.
4. Does the organisation hold the Two Ticks Award? The Two Ticks symbol is awarded by Jobcentre Plus to employers in England, Scotland and Wales who have made commitments to employ, keep and develop the abilities of disabled staff. For more information, visit www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/Employmentsupport/LookingForWork/DG_4000314

Note: While it is helpful to know which organisations appear positive about dyslexia, do not limit your applications to these alone. Choose employers who offer opportunities which match your own skills and interests.

Disclosure

Whether, when and how to disclose your dyslexia to an employer is a decision many people with dyslexia find difficult. There are advantages and disadvantages to disclosing. Your university careers adviser can help you to come to an informed decision. Before you talk to an adviser, research the job as much as you can. Think about how your dyslexia may affect you in that role and what adjustments might help overcome any difficulties.

Applications

When writing your CV and covering letter or completing an application form, you may find the following useful:

1. Ask your university disability office which assistive technologies or other means of support are available to you to make the application process easier.
2. Make sure you give yourself time to absorb the employer's recruitment literature. If it is long, find a friend or family member to read it aloud or use a software package to scan and convert to speech. If the material is available online, try text-to-speech technology such as JAWS.
3. Use speech recognition software such as Dragon Naturally Speaking to dictate your ideas to a computer.

4. If you are writing your CV or covering letter, make sure you use a spell-checker. Ask someone else to review grammar and spelling as well, as a spell-checker is not completely fool-proof.
5. If you are completing an application form, you can usually do this electronically. Type your responses in a Word document first so that you can have your grammar and spelling double-checked, before cutting and pasting it into the form. If the employer insists on a hand-written document, type it out in Word first or photocopy the form and write a practice copy. Get your draft checked before completing the actual form.

Interviews

If you choose to disclose that you are dyslexic, remember that the employer is likely to be interested in how your dyslexia will affect you in the workplace. Before the interview, think about how to describe this, together with your strategies for overcoming the effects. Your answers should relate strictly to how your dyslexia affects you at work: it is no concern of the employer how it affects you beyond this.

If the employer does not ask how your dyslexia affects you, offer a brief explanation. This can prevent the employer making false assumptions and may reassure them if they have had any concerns but are uncomfortable about asking you about these.

Are there any adjustments that you need or differences in the way that you may work in order to fulfil the requirements of your role? If so, list these on a single piece of paper and present it to the employer as a handout.

Provide the employer with positive rather than negative information, with solutions rather than problems. This will help them to focus on your abilities rather than your disability. For example, you could say, 'Although my dyslexia means I can find organising my time challenging, I have learned to overcome this by taking 10 minutes each morning to prioritise my tasks for the day. As a result, I only missed one university deadline in three years.'

If you find it difficult to identify the positives, your university careers adviser can help you with this.

The employer may be unaware of the strengths that can accompany dyslexia, for example innovative and lateral thinking, creativity and a high aptitude for solving problems. Again, decide in advance what applies to you. Prepare examples of times when you have demonstrated these abilities.

Selection tests

Some larger employers will use selection tools to assess your ability to do the job. These tools may include psychometric or aptitude tests, a group exercise or case study. The employer should tell you in advance which tools they use. If they

do not, ask for this information.

If you are concerned that your dyslexia could place you at a disadvantage, tell the employer in advance if adjustments, such as extra time to complete tests, are necessary to ensure you perform to the best of your ability. Sometimes you may be exempt from these tests as it will be considered a reasonable adjustment that the abilities they measure are identified in another way. If you are unsure what adjustments are allowed, contact the British Dyslexia Association or a disability organisation such as Skill (contact details below). You can also ask your careers service how best to prepare for the tests and for some practice examples: many services offer practice aptitude tests.

Further information

www.bdadyslexia.org.uk the British Dyslexia Association Helpline (0845 252 9002), the national organisation which offers information, support and advice to people with dyslexia and their families.

www.skill.org.uk Skill (the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities) for information, advice and practical help aimed at students and recent graduates. Information line: 0800 328 5050.

www.equalityhumanrights.com the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) for information and advice on disability legislation

www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/dyslexia.html the Dyslexia Forum where you can discuss issues with other people who have dyslexia and benefit from their ideas and experience.

www.dyslexic.com is a site where you can purchase assistive technologies and find out more about what technologies are available and suitable for you.

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