

Navigating Disclosure

Serving Deaf & Hard of Hearing Students

The how, when, and why of disclosing a disability to an employer can significantly impact one's ability to effectively obtain and maintain employment. In the workplace, disclosure refers to the act of making a disability known, typically to receive an accommodation.



Why Disclose?

The decision to disclose information about hearing loss is highly personal. Some helpful questions to consider during this decision-making process include:

- Is it apparent when someone meets me?
- Will accommodations help me interview effectively or perform the functions of my job?
- What are the potential risks of not disclosing?
- Is the employer interested in hiring qualified individuals with disabilities?

The accommodation process in the workplace is triggered when accommodations are requested. In general, employers are not required to provide accommodations without disclosure.

When to Disclose?

When to disclose hearing loss is another highly personal question. It may help to focus on the purpose for disclosing in the workplace - to obtain reasonable accommodations for job seeking or performing the essential functions of the job. Some examples of various disclosure scenarios likely to occur in employment settings include:

- Submitting a resume and cover letter to an employer
- Telephone and face-to-face interviews
- Group meetings
- Answering phone calls

Each deaf or hard of hearing individual may have different communication needs for these situations. Thinking about it beforehand facilitates the process.

Requesting Accommodations

When an offer for an interview is extended, is usually the time to request accommodations. The accommodation request can be made in a direct, courteous, and professional manner. Strong statements such as “you must provide me” or “the law says you must...” when making an initial accommodation request may alienate an employer. Be ready to discuss communication that occurs in meetings, making phone calls, and conversations with co-workers and strategies you can use on the job.

It is helpful to be prepared to offer specific information regarding accommodation needs. Some individuals may have several strategies to achieve equal access – sign language interpreters, speech-to-text services, assistive listening devices, instant messaging, or video remote interpreting. It’s a good idea to have contact information for local providers ready to share with employers should they request it.

The Law

There are several laws that provide for accommodations on the job. These laws include the Americans with Disabilities Act- Title I and Sections 501, 504, and 503 of the Rehabilitation Act. Key definitions include:

A **qualified individual with a disability** is a person who has the skills, experience, education, or other requirements of the position s/he holds or seeks, and who can perform the *essential functions* of the position with or without reasonable accommodation.



A **reasonable accommodation** is a modification of a job or work environment that will enable a qualified applicant/employee with a disability to participate in the application process or to perform essential job functions.

A **qualified interpreter** is able to sign what is spoken and voice what is being signed by the person who is deaf. To be qualified, an interpreter doesn’t necessarily have to be certified; s/he must be able to convey communication effectively, accurately, and impartially, using any necessary specialized vocabulary.