

Applications and interviews: a guide for employees

Deciding whether and when to tell an employer or prospective employer about your dyslexia is sometimes difficult. Understandably, many people feel that they will be unfairly judged and not given a fair chance. However, if you do not tell a prospective employer, they cannot make any reasonable adjustments for you during the interview or, if you are successful, when you start your new job. Both these times are very stressful and any dyslexic difficulties you have might be more problematic. This means that any strategies you have, or reasonable adjustments you need, are even more important.

Reasonable adjustments are changes your employer can make to help you do your job. They can include making changes to the way work is done or provision of equipment. Reasonable adjustments can also be requested for interviews. Below are some hints and tips which may help.

Application Process

Before you begin to apply for jobs it is useful to put together information such as:

- A list of your qualifications, the awarding body and the grades you achieved
- A list of any training courses you attended
- A chronological list of your past work experience including any voluntary work and the key tasks you carried out as part of the job. Note down all the employers' details including names of people who might provide a reference for you.

This will help to make sure you don't miss out important information and give you more time when the closing date for an application is short.

Filling out an application form:

- Allow enough time and find a quiet place to complete the form.
- Find out if the form is available to download so you can complete it on a computer. This will allow you to use spell check and you won't need to worry about your handwriting.
- If you have to fill in the form by hand, photocopy it and use this for your first draft.
- Once you have completed your first draft, leave it for a while then come back and read it afresh later. This will help you to see it more objectively.
- Try not to jump around in your answers. Use lists or mindmaps to structure your answer then write a rough draft before completing the form.

- Ask someone to read your answers over for you, and to read them aloud to you. This way both you and they can spot any errors.
- Make sure you complete all of the form and that you sign it.

Questions about your health or disability

It is up to you whether or not you declare that you are dyslexic. However, it is in your best interest to be truthful on an application form.

An employer isn't normally allowed to ask you questions about your health or disability before they offer you a job. They can only ask you about this for very specific reasons, for example:

- if they are using 'positive action' to recruit a disabled person, for example under the 'Positive about Disabled People' scheme (also known as the 'two tick' scheme - see logo below)
- to decide whether you can do something that is an essential part of the job
- to make 'reasonable adjustments', for example if you need a large print version of a test

The 'Positive about Disabled People' scheme means that all candidates who consider themselves to be disabled under the Equality Act 2010 are invited to interview. Candidates still have to demonstrate on their application form that they meet the minimum requirements for the post.



The interview Process - before the interview

- Confirm your attendance at the interview if this has been requested and ask for any equipment you might need, for example a projector to do a presentation.
- Make a tick list of what you need to do and what you need to take with you on the day then work through it.
- If you need reasonable adjustments at the interview, whether or not you have said that you are dyslexic, think about what these will be so there is time for them to be put into place. Only ask for the things you need.
- Decide what you will wear and make sure it is ready so there are no last minute panics.
- Check out the location, how to get there and how long it will take. Use Google Maps to see how long travel time will take and Google Earth to see what the building looks like. Plan for extra time so you arrive in plenty of time.

Interview Preparation

- Think about the type of questions that might be asked and how you would answer them.
- Make prompt cards or notes to take in with you so you can refer to them if you panic. Highlight key points and keep them simple so you can find the relevant bits of information easily.
- If you have to prepare a presentation, structure it using mindmaps or lists. Keep to the subject you have been asked to talk about and don't go off on a tangent. Practise and time yourself.
- If your presentation is electronic, take some paper copies – this way you know you have a backup if something goes wrong with the equipment
- If you have to do a proficiency task, for example using a particular type of software, practise each day so you are confident using it by the time the interview comes.

Talking about your dyslexia

If you have told your potential employer that you are dyslexic, or if you intend to do this at the interview, you need to be prepared to talk about it.

It is useful to think about what areas of the job might require reasonable adjustments and what they might be. This way you are not just saying that you have a difficulty, but you are offering a solution.

It might also be useful to provide them with a simple information sheet about dyslexia and a source of further information such as the Dyslexia Scotland Employers' guides and the details of Dyslexia Scotland's website.

Access to Work can help to pay for disabled people to get support in the workplace so it might also be worth telling your prospective employer to look into this.

Reasonable adjustments in an interview

Under the increased pressure of an interview situation, dyslexic difficulties can become more problematic. Taking time to process questions, organising your thoughts and structuring answers while still retaining all parts of the question can cause some people difficulties.

You can ask in advance to allow reasonable adjustments to be in place for an interview to help prevent these difficulties. The following are examples of reasonable adjustments that might be requested at interview:

- For written tests as part of the recruitment or promotion process, a reasonable adjustment might be extra time. 25% extra time is normal.
- You might ask for a longer interview in order to give you time to process and answer questions.
- Don't be afraid to ask for a question to be repeated.
- Ask for permission to use notes in the interview if you wish to do this.
- Ask that any large amounts of reading, for example a scenario or case study, is sent in advance or is available in an electronic version so you can use a screen reader.
- If there is a computer-based exercise you might want to ask if you can use your own laptop. This would allow you to use any assistive technology you are used to and will allow you to demonstrate that, with reasonable adjustments, you are fully capable of carrying out the task. Check in advance that this will work.
- Multiple choice and psychometric tests can be very discriminatory for many dyslexic people, although not all. You might want to ask for an alternative style of assessment. This must be done in advance.
- Request that multiple-staged questions are asked in steps.

Please note that these are just examples and this is not an exhaustive list.

Further information:

- www.gov.uk/equality-act-2010-guidance
- www.gov.uk/looking-for-work-if-disabled/looking-for-a-job
- Dyslexia: a Guide for Employees – see this and all of Dyslexia Scotland's leaflets at www.dyslexiascotland.org.uk/our-leaflets
- Dyslexia Scotland runs an Employment Service to help job seekers with dyslexia. Email info@dyslexiascotland.org.uk for more information.

