

Disclosing Dyslexia in the Recruitment Process

Introduction

The decision to disclose dyslexia¹ when applying for an opportunity is a personal one. It is worth considering:

The challenges your dyslexia may present in your chosen area of work. For instance, some jobs involve note taking. If this would be a challenge, you may consider disclosing so you can ask your employer for support, such as a voice recorder. Alternatively, you may decide your dyslexia will have little impact.

Visiting the employer informally can help you understand the environment and role, which in turn might help you decide if/when to disclose.

Marketing yourself positively: Skills gained as a result of dyslexia can be a useful tool when marketing yourself throughout the recruitment process. For instance, highlight any coping strategies and ingenuity you have developed. Focus on strengths, including those you have developed through dyslexia, for example:

- Good at ideas/innovative thinker.
- Excellent at trouble shooting.
- Lateral thinker.
- Intuitive problem-solving approach.
- Creative and positive in the way you make links/connections.
- Good with practical tasks.
- Good at communicating.
- Determined and persistent.

¹ Dyslexia is used throughout this guide but should also be taken to include all specific learning differences such as dyspraxia, dyscalculia, AD(H)D and so forth.

Dyslexia and the law

Under the Equality Act (October 2010) you have the right to be treated equally in employment if your dyslexia has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on your ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. Employers are obliged to make 'reasonable adjustments' to help you in both the recruitment process and in managing your work.

Dyslexic people can often reduce the impact of dyslexia if they are able to do things in their own way. In some cases, people have coping strategies which cease to work in certain circumstances, e.g. where placed under stress. This possibility should be considered when assessing the likely effects of dyslexia.

Public bodies such as universities, hospitals and local authorities are further required to show how they will proactively address disabilities including dyslexia, to create equal opportunities among staff.

Reasons for disclosure

Legal protection: You are only covered by law when you disclose your dyslexia to the employer. Employers are not allowed to ask any job applicant about their health or disability until the person has been offered a job. Medical questionnaires are often used once a job offer has been made. However, if you give false information and the employer finds out there could be implications in the future.

Positive employers: Many employers focus on a person's ability to do their job rather than the nature of their health or disability:

- Some organisations have an Equal Opportunities Policy and are committed to employing without prejudice.
- Companies that sign up to the government's 'Disability Confident' scheme should guarantee an interview to all disabled applicants who fulfil the minimum requirements outlined in a job description.
- Employers Forum on Disability is a leading employer membership organisation focusing on developing best practice on disability. Check if the organisation you are applying to is a member of the forum.

Think positively: You can market your dyslexia positively and take control of the situation. It might also be better to ask for help when you need it, than be seen to be struggling in your role and thus be considered a poor employee due to something which might easily be supported.

Access to work: You may be eligible for funding through the Access to Work initiative to cover extra costs at work, such as specialist equipment. Please note that you may need evidence to access this. Funding for reasonable adjustments may be available through this scheme, details of which can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>

Health and safety implications: This is generally unlikely in the case of dyslexia but for certain professions (for example medicine) it may be necessary to disclose to fulfil fitness to practise criteria. This puts a professional onus on the individual to acknowledge any areas where they would not feel competent to practise, and to take personal responsibility to not put themselves in these situations. For instance, a nurse or pharmacist who knows they have an issue with misreading information may have an obligation to disclose if it affects their 'fitness to practise'.

Prepare your employer: This can be very useful during the recruitment process. For example, if you are likely to encounter written tests at an assessment centre or interview, extra time could be offered (usually 25%). Some tests such as multiple choice and psychometric tests may have to be waived if you find the visual tracking and sequencing skills required very difficult. If you have memory problems, remembering what the question was whilst considering the options can prove difficult, so you could be putting yourself at a distinct disadvantage if you do not inform the recruiter.

When is it a good time to disclose dyslexia?

If you are going to disclose your dyslexia you need to consider the timing carefully.

Application form: Bear in mind an application form or CV is often the first contact you will have with an employer so consider how positive they are about dyslexia before disclosing. Consider the likely impact of dyslexia on your work and whether you need to reveal it at this stage. Use the supporting statement or competence-based questions to highlight any strengths or positive consequences of your dyslexia.

For example, in a skills section of an application form you could include: 'Having dyslexia has taught me to develop innovative organisational and time management skills to assist with my short-term memory recall and forward planning.'

Equal Opportunities monitoring forms: These are not usually used to judge your application and are often detached before reaching the selectors. They usually include questions about your ethnic background, gender, age and disabilities and are used to monitor the range of applicants.

CV and covering letter: The covering letter is a good place to raise any extra issues relevant to your application, but do not feel you have to centre the letter on the issue.

For example, in a covering letter for a teaching post you could include: 'In addition to the skills and qualities that I have already outlined, my own experiences of dyslexia will enable me to empathise with dyslexic pupils as well as providing students with a positive role model.'

Interview: This is an opportunity to demonstrate that you meet the job criteria focusing on your abilities, knowledge, and experience. The employer has called you for an interview because from the information you have provided on your application form or CV they like what they see. An interview allows you to expand on the beneficial effects your dyslexia has had on your life through a two-way conversation. It provides a means for the employer to understand your dyslexia and allay any concerns they may have.

Assessment centres: Written exercises or psychometric tests are often used in graduate recruitment and sometimes for placements or summer internships. It can be a good idea to inform the employer beforehand about your dyslexia if you have not already done so, especially if you feel it might otherwise affect your performance in the assessment centre. Extra time is often allowed (usually 25%) and you may be able to take the tests in a different room. Tell the employer well in advance of the test so they can make the necessary arrangements and you can get evidence of your dyslexia together if they ask for it.

At a later stage: If you don't think your dyslexia is very likely to affect you at work you may decide to disclose when you have been offered the job or when you start working. If you leave it until you have worked with the organisation for a few months, you will have had the opportunity to show your worth. This should be done in an upbeat and unapologetic manner e.g. 'I have had a few dyslexic difficulties – x, y and z and my suggested strategy for support is a, b and c.', this is both positive and proactive. The website brainhe.com/ has further suggestions for how you could present your dyslexia to your employer.

Further Resources

If you would like to discuss if, when and how you should disclose dyslexia in the recruitment process please contact Careers Network. Below is a list of other sources of information.

- British Dyslexia Association includes an “in work” section: www.bdadyslexia.org.uk.
- Business Disability Forum helps employers to become fully accessible and aims to transform the experiences for disabled employees: <https://businessdisabilityforum.org.uk/>
- Equality and Human Rights Commission is a statutory body with the responsibility to protect, enforce and promote equality across the nine "protected" characteristics including disability: www.equalityhumanrights.com.
- The Government website contains information on the Access to Work scheme and employment rights etc. www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/Employmentsupport/index.htm.
- The Dyslexia Foundation has advice on dyslexia in the workplace: www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/Employmentsupport/index.htm.