

Guidelines For Students Who Experience Disabilities

A general guideline for students who experience disabilities and are looking for work and/or participating in Co-operative Education, work experience or practicum work terms. Each circumstance should be treated uniquely and may require different strategies and outcomes.

Looking For Work When You Think You May Experience Disability-related Barriers

1. I suspect I may face disability-related barriers in the workplace, but I have never been formally diagnosed with a disability-related condition. What should I do?
 - Consider scheduling an appointment with your physician or a counsellor to determine a diagnosis of a disability-related condition or chronic health condition. A professional may help you to better understand and manage your condition, and recommend possible accommodations available to you.
 - Accessibility Services – Make an appointment with an access advisor at Mount Royal to discuss how a potential condition may impact you in the workplace. Call 403.440.6868.
2. I have a disability-related condition and I am looking for a job. What support and assistance is available for Mount Royal students and graduates from undergraduate credit programs? From my program coordinator/ advisor during my employment search and throughout my work term/practicum?
 - Students and graduates of undergraduate credit programs who are looking for employment can contact Career Services to get assistance and arrange an appointment with a certified career development professional. Call 403.440.6307.
 - If your program includes Co-operative Education or work experience, meet with your program coordinator. Students in Co-operative Education/work experience programs will receive information about the supports and assistance available in their Work Experience and Cooperative Education Handbook and during orientation sessions. Students can also call 403.440.6307 to book a meeting with their coordinator in advance.
 - Students in programs with a practicum can contact their program's practicum or faculty advisor directly to make an appointment.
3. What are some recommended information resources?
 - Career Services, Disabilities and Work – Resources for students who experience disabilities including information about employment, accommodation, disclosure and more. Visit mtroyal.ca/careerservices and click on Students >> Resources and Services >> Find Employment >> Disabilities & Work.
 - Career Services also has a resource centre and computer lab available to students for career and employment research.
 - National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS) – A consumer organization with a mandate to encourage the self-empowerment of post-secondary students experiencing disabilities. NEADS provides resources for students seeking employment.
 - The Government of Alberta provides Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS) Tip Sheets, which are short, easy-to-read articles on topics related to learning, employment and careers (see *Additional Information* section on page 6 of this document).

Disclosing Disability

1. I face disability-related barriers that are not visible. When applying to a job, am I required to disclose any information about disability-related conditions to a prospective employer?

No, you are not required to disclose information about disability-related conditions to a prospective employer unless accommodations are required in the workplace (i.e., certain working conditions, tools and technologies to help you be a successful employee).

When deciding whether to disclose, keep in mind that you cannot be discriminated against because you have a condition that may impact you in the workplace.

An employer has a legal obligation to take reasonable steps, without causing undo harm to himself and his business, to provide workplace accommodations according to your individual needs. It is important to understand, however, that this does not mean an employer has a legal obligation to hire you or even to grant you an interview. If you do not have the skills and qualifications for the job, or if your specific disability-related condition – even with reasonable workplace accommodation – interferes with your ability to effectively and safely perform your duties, the employer has no obligation to hire you.

Once you become an employee, it may be beneficial to disclose a disability-related condition to an employer so accommodations can be made. For more information, refer to the *Additional Information* section on page 6 of this document.

2. I experience a visible disability-related condition that affects my ability to speak clearly, and people often have difficulty understanding my speech. If I do not disclose in my cover letter, I am worried about an employer's reaction in an interview. How do I handle this situation?

Once you have secured an interview, you can e-mail the employer to inform him/her that you have a speech challenge that is heightened when nervous, and that you are happy to repeat yourself, if required. You may also choose to discuss your speech challenge at the start of the interview, e.g. "I realize people may be uncomfortable with a speech challenge, and I am happy to repeat myself if required."

3. What are the benefits of disclosing a disability-related condition to my program coordinator/advisor?
To an employer?

Program coordinator/advisor:

- You can discuss a variety of scenarios/options with your coordinator/advisor regarding your capabilities, how a disabling condition may impact performance in the workplace, accommodations required, suitable work term and practicum positions, pros and cons when disclosing to an employer, etc.

Prospective employer:

- Employers may be "disability-friendly" and have a strong commitment to include disability in their diversity recruitment programs. They will want to know early in the process that you may experience disability-related barriers.
- If you feel the experience you have gained as a result of a disability-related condition will benefit and distinguish you from other candidates, you should probably disclose.
- If you are interviewing with a visible condition, an employer may hesitate to initiate disability-related discussions but may still be making assumptions about what you can or cannot do based on your condition. You may choose to disclose so no inaccurate assumptions are made.
- You will need to disclose information about disability-related conditions to a prospective employer if accommodations are required in the workplace (i.e., certain working conditions, tools and technologies) to help you be a successful employee.
- Consider the benefits of starting a relationship with openness and honesty. Think about explaining how your disability may affect the employer, then present solutions or accommodations.

Existing employer:

- By discussing disability-related conditions with the employer, appropriate accommodations can be made to ensure a successful work experience.
- You can build an open working relationship from the beginning.
- If the disability-related condition has health and safety implications for you or others, you may be required to inform your employer.

4. What are the risks of disclosing a disability-related condition to an employer?

Prospective employer:

- You may not get an interview.
- You may not be considered for the position to which you applied.
- The employer may make false assumptions about your capabilities/skills.

Existing employer:

- If you wait until you are hired to disclose, the employer may become hostile/distressed.
- There may be a shift in the way you are treated by the employer.
- You may not be given the opportunity to demonstrate your skills (limited work activity due to lack of trust).

5. When is the best time to disclose to an employer?

Every situation is unique. Whether you mention it during the interview or at the time of the job offer depends on you and the situation. What is right for one person may not be right for another, and what works with one employer may not be successful with another. In some cases, it may be better not to disclose a disability-related condition to an employer (discuss the pros and cons with your coordinator/ advisor or your access advisor). Before deciding if, when and how to disclose, think about and discuss the following:

- Is the disability-related condition visible?
- How do most people react when they learn about the disability-related condition? How do you feel about their reactions?
- When do you feel most comfortable and confident disclosing?
- Are there any safety reasons (personal or organizational) that would affect your decision to disclose?
- How will your employer react to your disclosure? Will they think you are dishonest? How will you deal with their reaction?
- What misconceptions might the employer have about the disability-related condition?
- If you disclose, will you be able to reassure your employer that a disability-related condition will not affect your ability to do the work?
- Do you need accommodations for your interview? Or if you get the job?
- What do you know about this employer's policies and experiences regarding people with disabilities?

(Adapted from University of Alberta, Career and Placement Services Tips)

If you have had little success in disclosure situations or feel uncomfortable, try role-playing the disclosure process with supportive friends or family members. Here are some tips:

- Be positive. Focus on your skills and qualifications and don't present your condition as a weakness.
- Be prepared to address any concerns employers express, even if they are not expressed directly.

- Know what workplace accommodations you may require, including their availability, cost and what funding programs the employer can access.
 - Anticipate the employer's reaction to and possible questions about your disclosure, and know how you will answer the questions. Use examples.
6. If a disability-related condition won't affect my work term, do I have to disclose it to my employer?
- No, you are not required to disclose disability-related conditions to an employer if it is not a health and/or safety concern in the workplace. However, there is always a chance that the disability-related condition will affect your work term and it is best to have a plan in place to effectively deal with situations that may arise.
7. If a disability-related condition will impact the workplace, am I legally required to disclose to an employer before I am offered the position?
- In some cases, you may be required to disclose to the employer if health and safety are an issue in the workplace.
 - You will need to disclose information about disability-related conditions to a prospective employer if accommodations are required in the workplace (i.e., certain working conditions, tools and technologies) to help you be a successful employee.
 - Some employers perform testing which may require you to reveal a disability-related condition. Dishonesty/lying may be grounds for dismissal.

Accommodation

1. What accommodation is available through Mount Royal?

There are a number of services and supports available. Start by contacting Accessibility Services. Call 403.440.6868 to book an appointment with an access advisor to discuss the accommodations that need to be implemented.

Some helpful accommodation strategies may be found on the following links:

- [Accessibility Services](#)

Government of Alberta:

- [Accommodations – Working With Your Disabilities](#)
- [Disclosure: What to Say About Your Disability – and When](#)

2. What if my employer is unwilling to accommodate my special needs? What strategies are recommended to handle this situation?
- Accommodation on a work term is a joint responsibility between the University and the employer.
 - Please contact your program coordinator/advisor or faculty instructor immediately if the employer is unwilling to accommodate your needs. A meeting will then be arranged to discuss options.

Useful Tips For The Workplace

1. My disability-related condition does not affect me daily, but I have occasional flare-ups resulting in time away from school. I am worried about experiencing a flare-up during my work term. When should I tell my employer about my condition?

First, conduct research to determine whether or not the employer has accommodation policies in place. If it is a disability-friendly organization, consider disclosing to the employer so that the necessary accommodations can be made.

If it doesn't appear to be a disability-friendly organization, consider speaking to human resources regarding the organization's policy on accommodation.

Please note: You are not required to give the employer all the details about your disability-related condition – just what is required for adequate accommodation to be made.

2. What if I get sick during my work term/practicum and am unable to meet the minimum hours required? How will I make up the hours if I fall short?

If your sickness is a result of your disability which you have disclosed to your program coordinator/advisor, accommodations will be made by the University.

"Sickness" may not be the result of a disability. If you have not discussed your disability with your coordinator/advisor and accommodation is not required, then it may be necessary for you to defer and/or repeat your work term/practicum.

3. I am capable of doing the job but my employer insists on "holding my hand" and is not giving me challenging work. How do I approach my employer?

Be proactive:

- Consider the right time and place for discussing the situation.
- Use good communication skills:
 - » no threats or aggressive language.
 - » ask questions instead of making demands.
- Show your skills in a positive, "can do" manner.
- [New Job? Here's How to Make a Good First Impression](#)

4. I feel like I'm being ostracized by my co-workers. What should I do?

Be proactive.

- Be comfortable discussing your disability-related needs with co-workers. You eliminate misinformation by providing accurate facts.
- Early in your employment, find a co-worker – a "friendly face" – who will show you the ropes at the workplace and provide support. This "buddy" becomes your first ally and can help you develop other allies at work.
- As a new employee, take the initiative to make your needs known. Everyone needs to learn how to work together. You may want to ask co-workers about suggestions that will help build or improve the working relationship.

When problems arise:

- Carefully consider who you should discuss the situation with. Should it be a group discussion? A discussion with a supervisor? Is awareness training the answer?

There is no right or wrong answer in dealing with individual situations. Your response depends upon your work environment, your relationship with the person involved, and with your supervisor. Whatever you decide, address it in a positive manner. There are ways to resolve conflicts and find solutions that are satisfactory to all concerned.

Succeeding in the Workplace as a Person with a Disability

5. How can I learn more about my rights and responsibilities in the workplace?

To access information about your rights and responsibilities in the workplace – including before the job starts, the hiring process, on the job rights and responsibilities, and leaving the job – refer to the following links and resources:

Government of Alberta

- Alberta Human Services – [Employment Standards](#)
- Alberta Human Rights Commission – [Human Rights in the Workplace](#)
- ALIS – Your Rights and Responsibilities at Work
(copies are available at Career Services, A200 Kerby Hall)

Additional Information

This document was created by the Career Services' Disabilities Awareness Committee. For additional information and resources refer to the following contacts and websites.

Mount Royal University

- [Accessibility Services](#) – Contact an access advisor at 403.440.6868
- [Career Services](#) – Call 403.440.6307 to make an appointment:
 - General employment inquiries – meet with a certified career development coordinator
 - Co-operative Education or work experience – meet with your program coordinator
 - [Disabilities and Work](#)
- [MRU Policy 0517](#) – Academic Accommodation for Students Experiencing Disabilities

Alberta Government – ALIS Tip Sheets (alis.alberta.ca)

- [Accommodations – Working With Your Disabilities](#)
- [Disclosure: What to Say About Your Disability – and When](#)
- [Plan for Success – A Tip for Job Seekers with Disabilities](#)
- [New Job? Here's How to Make a Good First Impression](#)
- [Succeeding in the Workplace as a Person with a Disability](#)
- [Talking About Invisible Disabilities](#)

LD Online.org – [Tips for Self-Advocacy in the Workplace](#)

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Career Services

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