



ACCESSIBILITY
CONFIDENT EMPLOYERS
(ACE)

Understanding Your Accessibility Needs at Work:

A Tip Sheet for Job Seekers with Disabilities

Why understanding your accessibility needs matters:

Everyone works differently. Some people need specific tools, communication styles, schedules, environments, or supports to do their best work. For job seekers who are Deaf, Neurodivergent, and/or have a disability, understanding your accessibility needs can help you prepare for interviews, start a new job, ask for accommodations, and recognize whether a workplace is a good fit.

Accessibility needs can include:

Accessibility needs can be different for each person. They may relate to the physical space, communication, technology, sensory environment, scheduling, workload, mental health, or workplace culture.

Accessibility needs may include:

- step-free access, accessible parking, or accessible washrooms
- captions, sign language interpretation, or communication supports
- written instructions, plain language, or visual information
- assistive technology, adaptive equipment, or accessible software
- a quiet or low-sensory workspace
- flexible scheduling, breaks, or modified start times
- clear expectations, priorities, and deadlines

- support with transitions, changes, or new tasks
- a predictable routine or advance notice of changes
- remote or hybrid work, where possible
- ergonomic equipment or changes to a workstation
- support for fatigue, pain, anxiety, focus, or processing time
- respectful communication and psychological safety

An accessibility need is connected to removing a barrier. It does not mean lowering standards or changing the core purpose of the job.

Start with the job, not the diagnosis

You do not need to start by explaining your diagnosis. It can be more useful to think about the job tasks and what you need to do them.

Ask yourself:

- What are the main duties of this role?
- What tasks would I likely do every day or every week?
- What parts of the job could create barriers for me?
- What helps me communicate, focus, move, process, remember, organize, or manage energy?
- What tools or supports have helped me before?
- What conditions make work harder for me?
- What would help me meet the same expectations in an accessible way?

For example, instead of saying, “I have a disability,” you might identify a practical need: “I work best when instructions and priorities are provided in writing.” Or: “I need captions for virtual meetings.” Or: “I can complete the role’s core duties, and I may need a quiet workspace for tasks that require concentration.”

Common workplace barriers to think about

A workplace barrier is anything that makes it harder for someone to participate fully. Barriers are often built into systems, spaces, communication, or assumptions. Common workplace barriers may include:

- unclear instructions
- last-minute schedule changes
- inaccessible software or documents
- noisy or bright workspaces

- lack of captions or interpretation
- physical spaces without accessible routes
- meetings without agendas or written follow-up
- expectations that are not explained clearly
- stigma about disability, mental health, or accommodations
- pressure to work in only one way
- lack of flexibility during onboarding
- supervisors who do not understand accommodation responsibilities

When you can name the barrier, it is often easier to identify what support or accommodation may help.

How to identify what helps you work well

Think about past work, school, volunteering, caregiving, community work, training, or daily life. You may already know a lot about what helps you succeed.

You might ask yourself:

- When have I felt most successful or supported?
- What made that environment work well for me?
- What tools, routines, or strategies helped?
- What types of communication helped me understand expectations?
- What made things harder than they needed to be?
- What would have helped remove the barrier?
- What do I wish others understood about how I work best?

You can also think about support in three areas:

Before work starts: What do I need to understand the role, schedule, location, technology, and expectations?

While doing the work: What tools, communication, environment, or flexibility helps me complete tasks?

When things change: What helps me manage new tasks, feedback, conflict, stress, or changes in routine?

Turning needs into accommodation requests

Once you understand the barrier and what helps, you can turn that into a clear accommodation request.

A helpful request usually includes:

1. The barrier or work-related need
2. The accommodation or support that would help
3. How it supports your ability to do the job

Examples:

“I process information best in writing. Could key instructions, deadlines, and priorities be provided by email or in a shared task list?”

“I use captions to participate fully in virtual meetings. Could captions please be enabled for team meetings?”

“I can complete the customer service tasks required for this role. Because standing for long periods creates a barrier for me, I would like to discuss using a stool or seated workstation when possible.”

“I do my best focused work in a low-distraction environment. Could we discuss options for a quieter workspace or noise-reducing tools?”

“I may need short breaks during longer training sessions to manage fatigue and stay focused.”

Employers have a duty to accommodate disability-related needs unless doing so would cause undue hardship. This means adjusting rules, practices, conditions, or requirements so people can participate fully.

What you do and do not need to share

You may need to share enough information for the employer to understand the accommodation request. In most situations, you do not need to share your diagnosis, treatment history, or detailed medical information.

You can focus on:

- the barrier
- the task or work situation
- the accommodation you are requesting
- how the accommodation supports your work

You can say: “I do not need to share detailed medical information, but I can explain the accommodation I need and how it supports my ability to do the role.” Or:

“This accommodation is connected to an accessibility need and will help me meet the expectations of the position.”

If you are unsure what to share, you may want to speak with an employment service provider, disability organization, human rights office, union representative, or trusted support person.

Questions to ask an employer

You can ask questions about accessibility and support without sharing personal information. These questions can help you understand whether the workplace may be a good fit.

You may want to ask:

- “What does onboarding usually look like for this role?”
- “How are expectations and priorities communicated?”
- “Are instructions and deadlines usually provided in writing?”
- “What tools or systems does the team use to track tasks?”
- “How does the organization support employees who need accommodations?”
- “Who would I speak with if I needed an accommodation?”
- “Is there flexibility in how or where work is completed, where possible?”
- “What does supervision and feedback usually look like?”
- “How are schedule changes or role changes communicated?”
- “What does success look like in the first three months?”

The answers can help you decide what you may need, what to ask for, and whether the employer understands accessibility.

Quick accessibility needs checklist

Before or after applying for a job:

- I reviewed the main duties of the role.
- I thought about tasks that may create barriers.
- I identified what helps me communicate, focus, move, organize, or manage energy.
- I thought about tools, routines, or supports that have helped me before.
- I considered whether I need an accommodation for the interview.
- I considered whether I may need an accommodation on the job.
- I can describe my needs without sharing more personal information than I want to.

- I have questions prepared about accessibility, onboarding, supervision, or communication.
- I know who I can ask for support if I need help thinking through accommodations.

Learn more

- [The ACE Project](#)
Free accessibility training, tools, and resources to support more accessible, inclusive employment practices.
- [Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission: Duty to Accommodate](#)
Explains accommodation under Nova Scotia's Human Rights Act, including how rules, practices, conditions, or requirements may need to be adjusted to meet individual needs.
- [New Brunswick Human Rights Commission: Requesting Accommodations in the Workplace](#)
A plain language guide with practical information to help employees and employers navigate accommodation conversations under human rights law.
- [Newfoundland and Labrador Human Rights Commission: Understanding the Duty to Accommodate](#)
Explains the duty to accommodate human rights-related needs in Newfoundland and Labrador up to the point of undue hardship.
- [Canadian Human Rights Commission: Duty to Accommodate](#)
Explains the duty of employers and service providers to adjust rules, policies, or practices so people can participate fully.