



National Center *for* Learning Disabilities  
*The power to hope, to learn, and to succeed*

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# Getting a Job 101

An E-Book for Teens & Adults with LD

Prepared by the National Center for Learning Disabilities



# Why This E-Book?

It's a tough job market out there, and those who have learning disabilities (LD) have a harder time getting — and keeping — a job than those who do not. According to our 2011 **State of Learning Disabilities** report, “adults with LD face challenges with employment, most likely due to a lack of educational attainment. The unemployment rate for those with LD is twice ... that of those without LD.”

“Studies show that the unemployment rate for those with LD was twice that of those without LD.

- 2011 State of Learning  
Disabilities Report

Whatever your educational credentials — high school diploma, college degree, post-secondary certificate, or none of these — there are many steps you can take to prepare for the job market. Throughout this e-book, we will show you how to leverage your strengths to find a job you enjoy. We will also prepare you for challenges that may arise in the workplace as a result of having a learning disability. To this end we have included answers to questions about disclosure as well as tips for workplace success — valuable resources whether you already have a job or are on your way toward obtaining one.

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## What Are Your Marketable Skills?<sup>[1]</sup>

Many of your strengths and abilities are marketable. This means that they are of value to employers. Your marketable skills can be applied to specific jobs. Employers will want you to have both job-specific skills and the right disposition and interpersonal skills to adapt to the workplace. Job-specific skills may include carpentry, electrical wiring, computer programming, web design, fundraising, and accounting. General skills could include getting along with others, being a team player, managing time effectively, respecting diversity, organizing, and problem solving.





**The table below lists some key marketable skills and ways you can develop them.**

ACTIVITIES	MARKETABLE SKILLS
Participate in sports, clubs, and other group activities	Leadership and teamwork
Participate in group presentations in class or at club or community meetings	Listening, organization, public speaking, and processing information
Attend class, club, or community meetings on assignment; meet deadlines for turning in work	Time management, organization, follow-through, dependability, and responsibility
Cooperate with others on team efforts and respect the different cultures and opinions of those with whom you work	Adaptability, flexibility, and teamwork
Write letters and reports; solve everyday problems at home, school, or work	Critical thinking, writing, and problem solving

All of the skills listed above are valuable to employers, but they represent only a sample of potentially marketable skills. You may possess many others.

**Complete the following chart to get an overview of the skills you have and the skills you would like to acquire or improve.**

MY SKILLS	DO WELL	DON'T HAVE	NEED TO IMPROVE
Writing			
Public Speaking			
Planning			
Computer Skills			
Budgeting			
Managing People			
Organizing Projects			
Researching			
Training Others			
Decision Making			
Negotiating			
Problem Solving			
Leading			

1. "What Are Your Marketable Skills?" was written by Jenny Frank, CSW, and Roberta Omin, CSW-R

## Where to Look for a Job

It used to be that job seekers would simply open their local newspaper, search for openings in the Help Wanted section, and mail out a slew of resumés and cover letters to potential employers. But that approach is rarely effective these days. The vast majority of job listings can now be found only online, and most employers encourage, or even require, applicants to send their resumés and cover letters electronically. (If you don't own a computer, you will likely find one that you can use at your public library.)

But even before you start your online search, consider this: many jobs are filled without ever being listed. Instead, they are given to qualified friends or family members who learn of the opening through word of mouth. So take the advice of many career counselors and examine your personal network for potential leads.



Here are some useful steps you might consider taking:

1. Let people know you are looking for a job, and ask them to tell you if they hear of anything suitable.
2. Join the alumni networks for your high school or college, and take advantage of any career placement services these schools may have.
3. Join [LinkedIn](#), an online community that will connect you with friends, alumni, and professional acquaintances. LinkedIn also has extensive job listings.
4. Schedule an informational interview with an acquaintance who works in your field or desired field. Such informal interviews are good ways not only to find out more about a company or career but also to make a positive impression on someone who may be in a hiring position later on down the road.

In general, you will most likely find that many people who share something with you (a friend, an alma mater) are eager to help you find a job you love. Seek them out.

In some industries, especially retail and the restaurant business, it is accepted practice to simply show up at an establishment and ask to speak with the manager to express your interest in a job. This is especially beneficial if you feel you come across as a stronger candidate in person than on paper. Just be sure to dress appropriately, arrive on a day or at a time of day that isn't busy, and bring a copy of your resumé with you.

But in a tight job market, you will likely have to work several angles at once, and in most cases that will mean scouring online job sites and applying for openings you find there. Among the most popular employment sites are [Indeed.com](#), [SimplyHired.com](#), [CareerBuilder.com](#), [Monster.com](#), and [Craigslist.org](#). There are also sites that focus on certain fields. If you are interested in the nonprofit sector, visit [Idealist.org](#). [Dice.com](#) is an information-packed source for engineering and technology professionals. For opportunities in writing, editing, and other creative fields, check out [Mediabistro.com](#).

Finally, a number of websites are set up specifically to help people with disabilities find employment. You'll find these sites included in Chapter 12, the Resource List.

## Filling Out a Job Application

Many employers will ask you to complete a job application. Your application gives the employer important information about you, including your contact details (street address, telephone number, email address), education, skills, and job history. Sometimes you'll fill out and submit the application online. Other times, especially for smaller companies, you'll print the application, fill it out in black or blue pen, and then mail, fax, or email it to the employer. You may also visit a business in person and either fill out an application onsite or take an application home to complete and return later. Doing the latter allows you to take your time and check your work.

**Tip:** *Take home two copies of the application so you can use one as a draft.*



Applications completed in ink require you to write legibly. If your handwriting is hard to read, consider using a typewriter. All applications — in addition to detailing your education, skills, and experience — tell the employer about your ability to:

- ☐ Spell
- ☐ Read and follow directions
- ☐ Provide clear, accurate information

An application that is incomplete or has misspellings may keep you from getting a job. Develop the habit of filling out application forms neatly and accurately. You should also understand the terms that are commonly used on application forms.

## Terms and Definitions

**Education** - The high school and postsecondary schools you attended (include name of school, city and state, years attended, and year of graduation, if applicable). Be sure to include relevant certificate programs as well.

**D.O.B.** - Your date of birth (follow the directions for order of month, day, and year).

**Place of Birth** - City and state where you were born. If you were not born in the USA, include the country of your birth.

**Emergency Contact Person** - Someone the company can call in case of emergency (for example, your spouse, a relative, or a neighbor).

**Citizenship** - Mark “USA” if you were born or naturalized in the United States; otherwise, list the country of your birth. Provide visa status if this information is requested.

**Work History** - The names of employers you have worked for, their location, your job titles, and the dates of your employment. List your most recent job first and work backward in chronological order.

**References** - Names and job titles, addresses, phone numbers, and email addresses of people who can provide information that reflects positively on your past jobs or volunteer experiences, performance as a student, and so on.

**When you go to a place of employment to complete an application, be sure to take with you:**

- ☐ Two pens
- ☐ Your photo identification (driver's license, state ID, or passport)
- ☐ A completed data sheet or sample application that you can refer to when filling out the actual job application. You may find sample job applications at [jobsearch.about.com](http://jobsearch.about.com).



### **Tips to consider when completing a job application:**

- ☐ Answer every question. If the question doesn't apply to you, write "N/A," which stands for Not Applicable.
- ☐ Whenever possible, give a positive reason for leaving previous jobs, such as "to take a more challenging position" or "to go back to school," rather than a negative one ("didn't get along with the boss").
- ☐ Be sure to ask people if you may use as them as references before you list their names on an application.
- ☐ If the application asks for your expected salary, write "open" or "negotiable," unless you have specific requirements. If you request a salary that is too high, you may price yourself out of the job. If you request a salary that is too low, you may be leaving money on the table. Instead, focus on getting an interview and presenting yourself as the right person for the job. If you succeed in doing so, you will have more leverage in salary negotiations.
- ☐ Be neat. Review your application for accuracy before you turn it in.

# Resumé-Writing Basics

A resumé is a one- or two-page summary of your skills, achievements, education, and work experience. You send a resumé when you are applying for a specific job or when you are inquiring about openings at a company.

Most people – whether or not they have a learning disability – struggle with writing a resumé, especially for the first time. It helps to keep in mind the goal of your resumé: to generate an employer’s interest in you. The person reading your resumé wants to know if you will be a valuable employee. If your resumé clearly communicates strengths and skills that match those listed in a job description or desired by a company, the employer will want to meet with you.

You’ll find reams of resumé-writing advice, as well as samples, online at sites such as [Monster.com](http://Monster.com) and [jobsearch.about.com](http://jobsearch.about.com). But for many, it helps to work with someone face to face. Don’t hesitate to ask a teacher, family member, or friend to help you put together your resumé. People who know you and understand your learning disability can assist you in focusing on your strengths and achievements. High school and college career counselors are excellent resources as well.



You have no obligation to disclose your LD in your resumé. However, be thinking about circumstances in which you may want to discuss your LD — for example, if you require certain accommodations to succeed at specific job-related tasks. (Later chapters of this book discuss accommodations in detail.)

## The Parts of a Resumé

Below is a list of the sections of a standard resumé, in the order in which they are typically listed. However, resúmes vary widely in both content and format. As a rule of thumb, employers usually spend only about 30 seconds looking over a candidate's resumé before making an initial decision about his or her suitability for the position or the company, so make sure that your greatest strengths are also the most prominent ones. If you are applying for several types of jobs, consider making separate resúmes for each, highlighting those aspects of your experience that best match the job qualifications. Whatever format you choose, be prepared to talk about every aspect of your resumé in a job interview, so if there is something you particularly want to discuss, make sure it is on there. On the flipside, you may downplay weaknesses by leaving out or minimizing positions that proved to be a bad fit, as long as everything that is on the resumé is truthful and accurate.

1. **Contact information.** At the top right or top center of your resumé, list your full name, street address, telephone number(s), and email address. If available, include your professional website address as well.

2. **Objective.** If you want to, you may include a brief statement of your career goal, but it is not necessary. For example, you may write: “To obtain a job as a health care assistant in a senior center or nursing home.” Objectives are more common in some fields than in others. Research your particular field to determine standard practice. If you do include an objective, make sure that it is a close or, better yet, exact match with the job you are applying for. Any discrepancy will hurt your chances of getting the position.
3. **Education.** Include the names, cities, and states of the high schools and post-secondary schools you attended, the years you attended, the degrees or certificates you earned, and the courses of study you pursued, along with any special training, honors, or scholarships you received. List the schools in reverse chronological order, beginning with the most recent. If are still in school, you may list as the date the year you began through the present. If you have extensive post-secondary education, you may choose to leave out your high school.
4. **Work experience.** For each job you've held, include the name and location of the employer, your job title, the dates of employment, and a brief description of your responsibilities and accomplishments. List jobs in reverse chronological order, beginning with your most recent position and working backward. If your jobs fall into distinct categories, you may create separate sections, such as “Advertising Experience” and “Marketing Experience.” Depending on your experience and objective, you may

lump paid positions, volunteer positions, and internships together or create separate headings for them.

5. **Skills and achievements.** Computer skills, fluency in other languages, and other technical expertise all belong here, as long as they are relevant to the job you are seeking. Awards and honors may also be listed here or, if they are school-related, in the education section.

Even if this is the first time you're looking for a job, you can still write an appealing resumé. Summer jobs, paid or volunteer, can show initiative and dependability. Extracurricular activities (sports, clubs) can show your ability to complete projects or work as a team player. Awards and honors demonstrate your accomplishments. Be sure to include any job-related skills you may possess and include your GPA if it is over 3.0.

## Resumé Appearance

Employers should be able to find the most important aspects of your resumé, as well as your most impressive credentials or experience, at a glance. Your name should be particularly prominent (often in a larger font than the body of the resumé, and in boldface type), as should your section headings (Education, Work Experience, Skills, and so on). Formatting should be applied consistently throughout for maximum readability: all headings, for example, should be in a specific font, font size, and style (bold, italics), with the same amount of space above and below them. Likewise, all body text should

be in a single 10- to 12-point font — Arial or Times Roman are safe choices. In general, if the resumé is short, the body text font should be slightly larger to fill out the page; if the resumé is long, the font may be slightly smaller.) Even if you're submitting your resumé electronically, have a hard copy version available to take to your interview or to leave with a prospective employer. Hard copies are also easier to proofread.

## Tips for Putting Together Your Resumé

- ☐ Concentrate on your strengths. For each characteristic that you think an employer might want (dependability, problem solving, initiative), collect examples from your work history or other past experiences to prove you have it. Wherever possible, emphasize your flexibility and willingness to adapt to new situations and learn new skills.
- ☐ Write simply and clearly, using strong, active verbs such as managed, completed, organized, and directed to describe your experience. Use bullet points to draw the reader's attention to each separate responsibility or accomplishment.
- ☐ Be specific. It is not enough to say you possess or are willing to acquire certain desirable qualities; you must show you have them. When possible, support your accomplishments with statistics and examples. In addition to writing "helped organize annual fundraiser," for example, add the following: "which raised \$3 million

for local charities.” Do the necessary research to find these types of details.

- Tailor your resumé to the particular company or job you are applying to, emphasizing the skills and experience requested. Always print a fresh copy of your resumé on high-quality bond paper to give to an employer. (Don’t use photocopies.)
- Make sure your resumé is error-free. To make a strong first impression, your resumé must be free of typos and other errors in grammar, spelling and punctuation. Be sure to run a spell check and grammar check on your resumé and proofread a hard copy before sending it out. It’s an excellent idea to have at least one other person proofread it as well.

When mailing out your resumé to potential employers, either through regular mail or electronically, be sure to include a cover letter.



# How to Write a Cover Letter

Whether you're responding to a specific job opening or simply writing to express interest in working at a company, you should send a cover letter along with your resumé. The main purpose of your cover letter is to direct the reader to your resumé, but it is also a sales pitch in its own right. Highlight in your letter exactly which skills and experiences found on your resumé make you a great candidate for the position, and why the particular job or company is appealing to you. As with your resumé, make sure you proofread your letter before sending it, and ask someone else to proofread it as well. Your letter must be free of typos and errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

The vast majority of cover letters (and resúmes) are now sent by email. Career experts suggest that you write your cover letter into the body of the email and attach a copy along with your resumé. The only difference between the two is that your contact information should follow your name when it goes into the body of the email, whereas it should be centered at the top of the letter (like letterhead) on an attachment, which follows print conventions. It is a good idea to convert both your cover letter and your resumé into PDF (portable data format) files to preserve the formatting.



Other tips to consider when writing your cover letter:

- ☐ Address your letter to a specific person whenever possible. If a name isn't given in an employment ad, do some online research to find the answer or simply call the company and ask to whom you should address your letter. Use "Dear Sir or Madam" only if you have exhausted all other options.
- ☐ State what is enclosed (your resumé) and why you are enclosing it (to apply for a specific job or for any appropriate opening in the company).
- ☐ Briefly explain why you are well suited for the job. Match experience, skills and accomplishments from your resumé with the qualifications required for the position. The more closely these match, the better your chances will be of landing an interview.
- ☐ Include all pertinent contact information: your name, address, telephone number, email address, and professional website, if you have one. Do not provide information that is overly personal or could be construed as unprofessional, such as a blog, Facebook page, or Twitter feed.
- ☐ Follow directions. If you are responding to an advertisement or have been given specific instructions by the employer, be sure to follow the directions carefully.
- ☐ Tell what future action you'll be taking (a follow-up phone call or email).

- ☐ Say thank you. Close with an expression of appreciation and a request for an interview: "I look forward to meeting with you to discuss my qualifications. Thank you for your consideration."

## Sample Cover Letters

You'll find abundant resources online and at the library about how to design your resumé and write your cover letter. Before you go searching, though, here are two sample cover letters to guide you, one from a student seeking a summer job, the other from a recent college graduate.

Take a look at the following example cover letters. The opener "Please consider me" is used in both of the examples. Another option is to begin the letter with "I am writing to apply for" followed by the name of the position and where you saw the position advertised.

Download our [sample cover letters](#) PDF.

**Download**

## Preparing for a Job Interview

If you have been called for a job interview, give yourself a pat on the back — your application materials have gotten the employer interested in you. Ideally, the interview will increase that interest and lead to an offer. But keep in mind that the interview is not just for the employer to assess you; it is also your chance to learn about the job responsibilities, the employer's expectations, and the work climate. An interview should also help you to better understand how your learning disability might or might not present challenges in this specific job and workplace.





## Telephone Interviews

Most interviews are conducted face to face. You meet with an interviewer at a scheduled time. Some employers, however, conduct telephone interviews, particularly with candidates who do not live nearby. Telephone interviews are just like in-person interviews and can be prepared for in the same way. Remember that during a phone interview, you'll need to make a favorable impression without the aid of the social cues inherent in an in-person interview: professional appearance, eye contact, and so on. When doing a phone interview, remember to do the following:

- ☐ Go to a quiet place where you won't be distracted.
- ☐ Keep your resumé and the job description next to the phone so you can refer to them during the interview.
- ☐ Have a pen and paper handy to take notes; if using a computer to take notes, make sure your typing is not too noisy.
- ☐ Turn off call-waiting so you won't be interrupted.
- ☐ Use a landline or online phone service such as Skype or Vonage if your cell phone service is unreliable.
- ☐ Have a glass of water nearby.

- ☐ Speak slowly and clearly.
- ☐ Do not interrupt the interviewer.

If you're having a video interview, make sure to dress as if the meeting were being conducted in person. Be aware that the camera will pick up anything that's behind you, so find a place that is tidy and free from distractions (such as someone walking behind you or a pet jumping on your lap).

## What to Expect at a Job Interview

A job interview can be a stressful event, but you can reduce your anxiety by being well prepared.

In general, job interviews cover the following areas:

- ☐ **Your personal qualities** — strengths and weaknesses and whether you prefer to work as part of a team or independently
- ☐ **Your work history and skills** — what kinds of experiences you have had and how they have prepared you for the prospective job
- ☐ **Your interest** — why you are interested in this particular job and this particular company or organization

The same laws that protect you from discrimination on the job also protect you during an interview. *At a job interview, the prospective employer is not permitted to ask if you have a*

*disability*. You may want to wait until after you are offered a job to disclose your learning disability and your need for accommodations (for more on accommodations, see part 2 of this book, “On the Job”).

Remember, an interview is not for the employer’s benefit only; it should help you determine if the job and the company are a good fit with your needs and goals.

## Practice Questions

Use the following worksheet to formulate your answers to typical job interview questions. You might also role-play with a family member or friend. The more you practice, the more confident you will be during the actual interview, especially if your learning disability impacts your communication skills.

Download our [practice questions](#) PDF.

[Download](#)

## Following Up

After thanking the interviewer, ask if you might arrange a face-to-face meeting. In-person interviews are the best way to make job decisions, both for you and for an employer.

Promptly follow any form of interview by sending a thank-you note, either by email or post, to the person who interviewed you. As with all of your application materials, make sure it is neatly written and free of errors and typos; otherwise it could actually hurt your chances of getting the job.

You may call or email about a week after your interview to check on the status of your application, restate your interest, and express your openness to answer more questions, but it is not advisable to do this again. You will be contacted with further instructions — to provide references, say, or come in for a second interview — if the prospective employer wants to continue the dialogue. Unfortunately, employers rarely offer a definitive “no”; they simply cease to be in communication with candidates who are no longer in the running for the job. Try to accept this outcome graciously, as they may keep your resumé on file and contact you when there are future openings.



## Disclosing Your LD

Congratulations! You've gotten the job. Now the question is: Do you disclose your LD or keep it to yourself? There are arguments on both sides. Many adults fear that if they disclose their LD to their supervisor, they will no longer be trusted to take on important projects. Others fear being stigmatized by their coworkers. However, you should know that more people today are familiar with learning disabilities than ever before, and LD on the job has become more prevalent and generally accepted. What is more, if you decide to tell your boss about your LD and need for accommodations, this information must be kept confidential. Your coworkers are not entitled to know about your disability unless you choose to tell them.

The National Collaborate on Workforce and Disability (NCWD) offers advice on how to make an informed decision in their workbook, *The 411 on Disability Disclosure*.



If you decide to disclose your learning disability, be prepared to discuss the following:

- ☐ The features of your specific learning disability
- ☐ How your LD affects your performance
- ☐ The accommodations or modifications you need to be successful on the job
- ☐ Examples of successes you have had in the past when you have used these accommodations

Be straightforward in your statements. Discuss your disability briefly, honestly, and in a positive light. For example, you might say something like the following: “I have a learning disability that affects my understanding of multistep instructions when they are given verbally. You can help me by either writing the instructions down or permitting me to either write them down or record them. In my last job, my supervisor always sent me email messages with instructions, and it worked out fine. In fact, I received an outstanding evaluation on my last performance review.”

At this point, you should be prepared to answer questions about your LD. There is a common misunderstanding that learning disabilities are somehow related to other conditions like intellectual disabilities (formerly known as mental retardation) or vision and hearing impairments. Be prepared to dispel these myths. You may even wish to give your employer a simple fact sheet on learning disabilities.

After you have come to an agreement with your employer about your specific LD-related needs, you might want to ask for a memo or letter documenting your discussion and detailing any specific accommodations that you have arranged. Asking for this memo should not be seen as adversarial, but rather as a record of mutual understanding of what you need to be productive on the job.

## Choosing Not to Disclose

Depending on the type of job you have and your job responsibilities, you may wish to explore ways to circumvent problems without disclosing your disability. For example, you may arrange to share responsibilities with a coworker to capitalize on each of your strengths. The following are some real-life examples from people who decided not to disclose their LD.

### The Trade-Off — Exchanging Work

1. Frank's job requires him to do a quarterly report. Frank dreads turning in his reports because he has trouble writing. He finds it difficult to organize and outline his thoughts, so his reports are not always as clearly written as they could be. But Frank has great artistic talents. So he asked his co-worker, Janice, to help him outline and organize his quarterly reports and to review his drafts before he sends out the final copies. In exchange, Frank has offered to design the layout and format of Janice's reports.

2. Consuela has trouble balancing the monthly budget at work. But she has great people skills. She has asked Carey to handle the budget. In exchange, Consuela has offered to make Carey's beginning-of-month sales calls to customers, telling them about the monthly specials. Carey is happy to handle the budget and not have to make those monthly phone calls.

There are other ways to self-accommodate besides exchanging tasks with a coworker. Look at the following examples.

### The Trade-Off — Tricks of the Trade

1. Frank might try to self-accommodate by asking his supervisor if he can install a software program on his computer that can help him outline his thoughts when writing. Frank can simply tell his boss that the program helps him work more efficiently without disclosing that he has LD.
2. Sarah is expected to take minutes at the monthly staff meeting. But Sarah has trouble writing down what's been said while the conversation continues. So she has asked her boss if she might tape-record the staff meetings to be sure that she doesn't miss anything. Then she can play back the tape later to be sure her notes are complete.
3. Micah is a machine operator and has trouble measuring to the fraction of an inch. So he developed a small card to fit in his wallet. The card had an enlarged picture of an

inch on it. Micah was then able to compare the picture of the fraction on the card with the location on the ruler.

As you can see, it is often possible to make adjustments to your work that will allow you to you perform your job duties without disclosing your LD.

Ultimately the choice is up to you.



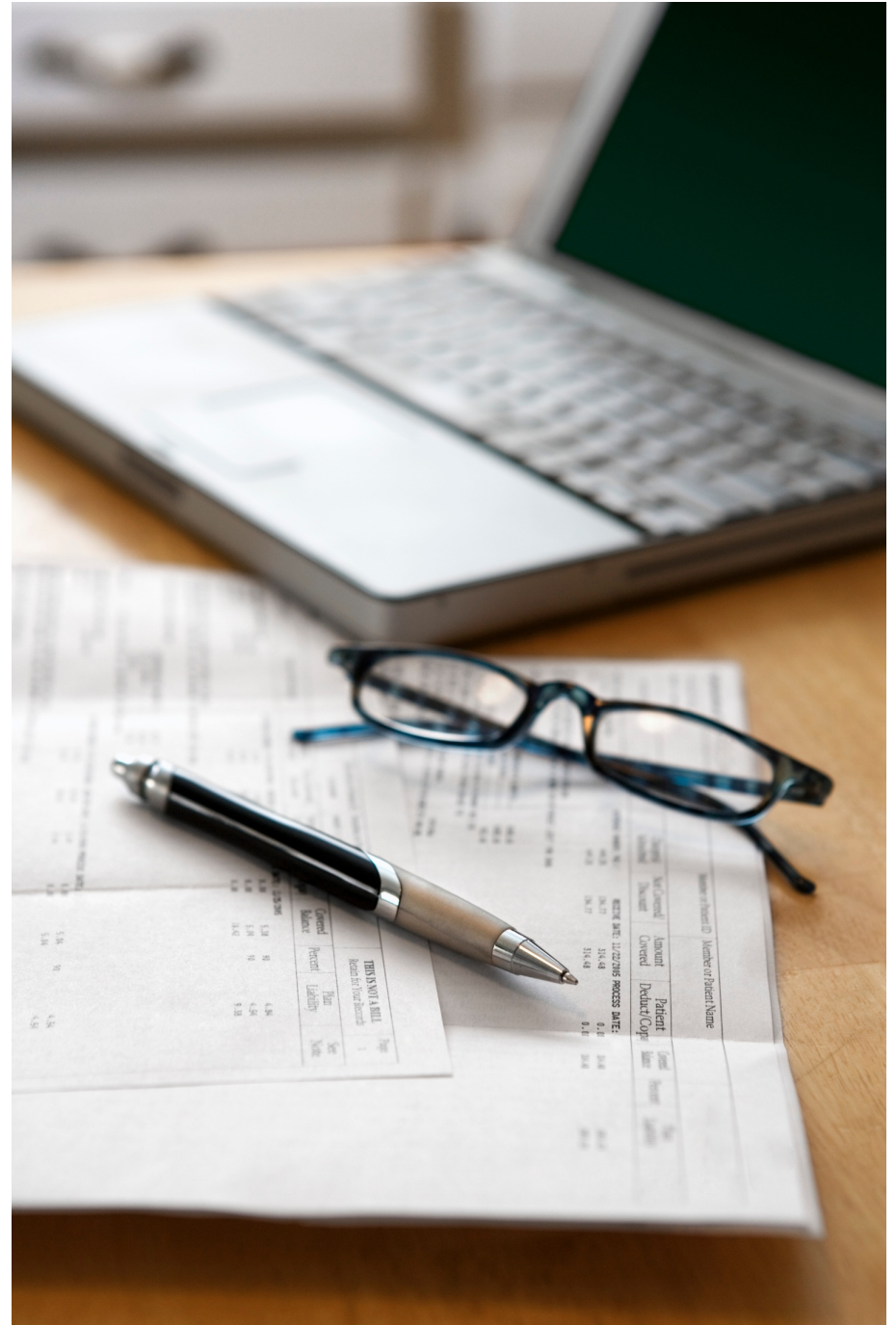
## CHAPTER 8

# Personal Story: How I Disclosed My Dyslexia

*The following story was prepared by Liz Fife, an adult with dyslexia who works in finance.*

Being dyslexic has affected my entire life; however, I was never more aware of the extent of my disability than when I entered the workforce. After I was diagnosed with dyslexia in the third grade, my parents wisely transferred me to a school that understood the challenges of learning disabled (LD) students and never lowered their expectations of me compared to non-LD students. I was lucky: the new school enabled me to receive additional time and assistance without questioning my potential to earn an A or attend the college of my choice, the University of Pennsylvania.

Still, throughout high school and college I believed that being dyslexic was an insurmountable curse. I had to work harder than all my friends, staying up until 4 a.m. on a regular basis and missing out on parties and social experiences, and I could never get past my anger that reading and writing came so much easier to “normal” students.



However, my disability became much more apparent when I started working at an investment bank. Suddenly my work product affected my whole team, not just my grade at school. Initially I did not mention my dyslexia to coworkers for fear that they would regret hiring me or think less of me. But as time passed I realized that I was doing myself an injustice by not speaking up.

How could I expect my superiors to understand that I took longer to complete a task because of my disability and not because I was procrastinating? Or that I forgot what they had just requested not because I wasn't paying attention to what they were saying, but because my brain is wired differently, resulting in poor short-term memory?

When I finally told one of my coworkers about my dyslexia, he turned to me and said, "OK, I understand what you're saying, but I'm not sure what you want me to do." Good question. Did I want him to treat me differently than others? No. Did I want him to give me less work than others? No. What I wanted was for him to simply understand what I was going through. That's the thing about having a learning disability: No one can see it by just looking at you. Unless you speak up, no one will have any idea. For some people, this is the best part of a learning disability — that they can hide it from the world. But what good is that doing?

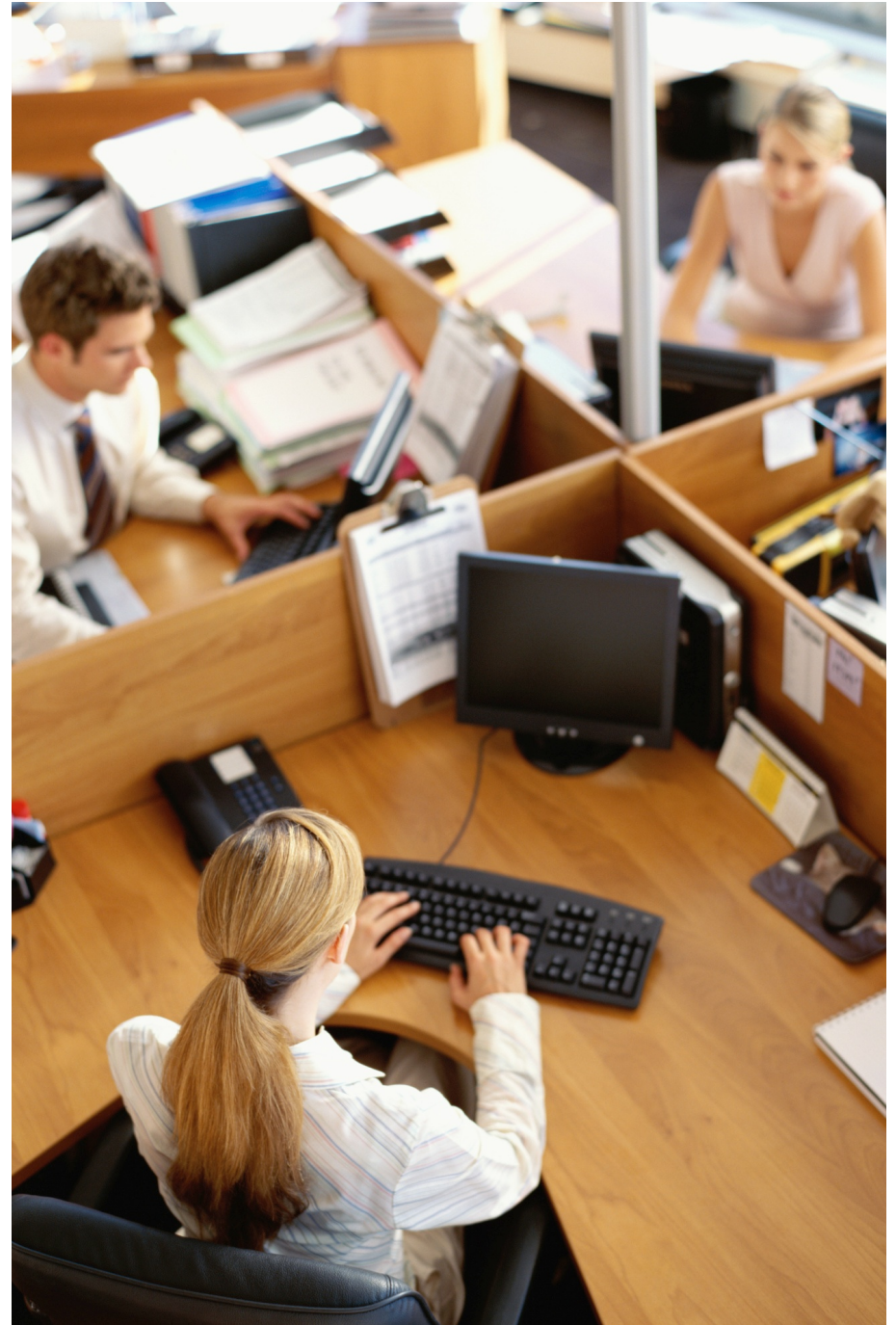
Not until I opened up to my coworkers did I understand that while dyslexia is indeed a disability, it is also a source of strength. I had to learn at a young age how to overcome setbacks, work extra hard to get where I wanted, and push against adversity. In turn this gave me an advantage over my peers and has led me to succeed in school and work. Now when I talk about my experience living and working with dyslexia, my friends and colleagues can see my determination and drive and not just my disability.



## Job Accommodations for People with LD <sup>[1]</sup>

The **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** requires that reasonable accommodations be made for workers with disabilities by employers who have 15 or more employees. The term “reasonable accommodation” refers to changes in the workplace that enable people with disabilities to effectively perform the tasks associated with their job. Accommodations can help people with learning disabilities do their work well, even when their disability makes the work difficult. Accommodations can include alterations to the following:

- ☐ Work spaces and equipment needed to complete tasks
- ☐ Communication
- ☐ The tasks themselves
- ☐ The time and place that the work is done



Accommodations should be based on the specific needs of the individual and her employer. Employers can claim that a given accommodation is an undue hardship and can propose a different one. The process of negotiating for reasonable accommodations is one of give and take.

You can request accommodations even if your employer has fewer than 15 workers on the job. It is in your supervisor's best interest to help you be productive. Even people with learning disabilities who work for themselves need to think about how to incorporate accommodations into their work routines. They must identify their areas of strength and figure out how to get around areas of weakness.

Here are some tips to help you determine what kind of accommodations might be useful to overcome difficulties in the workplace:

- ☐ Analyze the task that is giving you difficulty. Be exact about the nature of the problem at hand.
- ☐ Analyze the aspect of your disability that is contributing to the difficulty.
- ☐ Consider what changes could be made to the work environment, your work style, your communication style, your supervisor's communication style, and the job itself to accomplish the task.

- ☐ Implement one of the solutions.

- ☐ Assess whether the accommodation is meeting your needs. Share feedback with your supervisor and make any necessary adjustments to sustain your success.

If you need further suggestions, contact the **Job Accommodation Network** (JAN), a service of the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy. JAN consultants have a vast database of accommodations and may be able to give you more ideas once they are familiar with your specific situation. (Information is also available in Spanish.)

Remember that you can do the job as well as anyone else even though you are doing it in a different way. On many occasions, accommodations for people with learning disabilities have been adopted by other people in the office, raising productivity for everyone.

*1. This chapter is an updated version of an article originally written by Dale S. Brown for NCLD's former magazine, *Their World*. Dale S. Brown is an advocate for people with learning disabilities and has written many articles and several books on the topic, including *Learning a Living: A Guide to Planning Your Career and Finding a Job for People with Disabilities, Attention Deficit Disorder, and Dyslexia*.*

## Types of Accommodations to Solve Common Job Problems<sup>[1]</sup>

Here are some typical problems experienced on the job by people with learning disabilities such as **dyslexia**, **dyscalculia**, or **dysgraphia**, along with accommodations that have been successfully used to work around them.





**Job problem:** You have severe difficulty reading.

**Possible accommodations:**

- ☐ Ask someone to read to you.
- ☐ Ask people to leave messages on your voice mail rather than give you written notes, or talk to you rather than write you letters.
- ☐ Request that your boss give you oral rather than written instructions.
- ☐ Ask that important information be highlighted in written material.
- ☐ Use a reading machine (like a reading pen).
- ☐ Install “read aloud” software on your work computer to translate writing into speech.

**Job problem:** Your reading problem is not severe, but it is still hard for you to read large amounts of material.

**Possible accommodations:**

- ☐ Attend briefings about the material.

- ☐ Discuss the material with coworkers.
- ☐ Obtain recorded versions of documents.
- ☐ Ask someone to tell you the key points of reports.
- ☐ Manage your work so that you have enough time to read what is required to get the job done.
- ☐ Get information from drawings, diagrams, and flow charts.
- ☐ Ask your supervisor, team members, or subordinates to organize some information in this way.
- ☐ Have “read aloud” software installed on your work computer to translate written material to speech.
- ☐ Request shorter versions of documents.
- ☐ Job problem: You lose things frequently.

**Possible accommodations:**

- ☐ Organize your work area and keep it that way. Work with your supervisor and team to assure that common areas such as tool stations, files, and bookshelves stay neat.

- ☐ Put important objects, such as keys, in the same place each time you use them.
- ☐ Color-code items. Keep things on shelves, bulletin boards, or other places that are visible; avoid storing important items in drawers or cupboards.
- ☐ Physically attach important objects to places where they are most needed or most visible. For example, you might tie your scissors to a hook bolted on your desk or pin documents to your bulletin board.

**Job problem:** You have difficulty following spoken directions.

**Possible accommodations:**

- ☐ Ask people to tell you important information slowly and clearly in a quiet location.
- ☐ Ask people to write things down.
- ☐ Request that people follow up their oral instructions with an email note.
- ☐ Ask people to demonstrate tasks and then watch you do them.
- ☐ Take notes and ask your supervisor to review them, or write a memo that summarizes that information.

- ☐ Repeat instructions back to people, making sure they verify that your interpretation is correct.
- ☐ Record important procedures and instructions so you can play back and review them as needed.
- ☐ Ask several people for feedback on how to do a task.

**Job problem:** You have difficulty understanding the underlying message of what is said.

**Possible accommodations:**

- ☐ Ask people to talk to you directly and to be specific in their message.
- ☐ Ask questions designed to draw out hidden meanings. For example, you might say to a displeased coworker: “Are you saying you disagree with me?” or “It sounds like you are irritated because you think I did something wrong. Is that true?”
- ☐ If you find yourself in a situation where you think there is a hidden meaning, come up with a hypothesis about what a person meant. Then discuss the interaction with others and study the surrounding events to assess your accuracy.

- ☐ Develop a relationship with someone who can let you know if a misunderstanding seems to have occurred. Ask them to clarify the miscommunication privately or with the other party.

**Job Problem:** You forget deadlines.

**Possible accommodations:**

- ☐ Obtain computer software that enables you to program reminders into your computer.
- ☐ Use a voice organizer or signal watch or program your smartphone to remind you of scheduled events. Some telephone voice mail systems have a reminder feature, causing the phone to ring at a specific time and even play a reminder message.
- ☐ Use a tickler file with a section for each month and a section for each day. Review the file each day.
- ☐ Ask your supervisor to remind you of important deadlines or to review priorities and deadlines with you on a regular basis.

*1. This article is an adaptation of one originally written for NCLD's former magazine, Their World. Dale S. Brown is an advocate for people with learning disabilities and has written many articles and several books on the topic, including Learning a Living: A Guide to Planning Your career and Finding a Job for People with Learning Disabilities, Attention Deficit Disorder, and Dyslexia.*



## More Tips for Workplace Success

Whether or not you decide to disclose your LD and ask for formal accommodations, there is much you can do to ensure that you are a productive, valued worker. Your co-workers are not entitled to know about your LD unless you decide to tell them.



Here are some of the most important.

1. **Obtain a written list of job performance expectations.** You need to know what is expected of you on the job. Review this list frequently to ensure that you are meeting the criteria demanded of you.
2. **Know the schedule for performance evaluations.** Evaluations can be great motivators to keep you on track. Be sure to find out what the performance evaluation will include and how your work will be assessed.
3. **Understand your social and communication styles** so you can form supportive relationships with your coworkers. You want to establish yourself both as a hardworking, capable individual and as a cooperative team member. Work to fit in to the workplace community and culture.
4. **Be flexible.** It is likely that you will set up routines and systems to help you do your job only to be faced with situations and tasks that are unfamiliar and challenging. When this happens, call on the organizational skills that you developed in school and in previous jobs to help you take things in stride. Being flexible will not only make you a more valued worker but will help you develop essential problem-solving skills.

5. **Capitalize on your strengths.** People with LD who have had success at work tend to develop strengths as a result of dealing with obstacles that can be presented by LD. These strengths, sometimes called “soft skills,” can turn out to be extremely valuable to their companies and their coworkers. Persistence is one of the most important characteristics seen in people with LD who have achieved success. Because they keep trying to solve problems, even after their coworkers have given up, they inspire those around them to work harder, often boosting the bottom line in the process. Creativity and resourcefulness are also hallmarks of many people with LD, who typically “think outside the box” and discover solutions that others may have overlooked or never even considered. Do an inventory of your unique strengths and make sure you are putting them to work for you and your company. Check out [Skills to Pay the Bills: Mastering Soft Skills for Workplace Success](#) to learn more about soft skills you may possess.

## Resource List for Adults with LD in the Workplace

Looking for more information? Check out our “**Adults with LD**” section on LD.org, in addition to **videos** and **podcasts** on all aspects of learning disabilities.



Here are some more resources to help find – and find success in – a job you love.

- ***The 411 on Disability Disclosure***: Published by the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability (NCWD), this comprehensive, interactive workbook helps young adults make an informed decision whether or not to disclose their disability on the job and in other settings.
- **American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD)**: The American Association of People with Disabilities promotes equal opportunity, economic power, independent living, and political participation for people with disabilities. The Workplace & Employment section of their website contains information about Disability Mentoring Day, which connects thousands job seekers nationwide with employers each October, and AAPD's paid summer internship program, which places students and recent graduates at government and nonprofit jobs in Washington, DC.
- **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**: The U.S. Department of Justice's official website for the Americans with Disabilities Act provides an overview of federal civil rights that protect adults with learning disabilities.

- **Disability.gov**: The federal government manages this web portal to efficiently direct people with disabilities to services and organizations that can help them. The Employment section includes job listings broken down by location and type of disability, as well as answers to frequently asked questions by people with disabilities seeking employment.
- **DisaboomJobs**: This website bills itself as the leading source of jobs and employment information for people with disabilities. It allows you to fill out an online profile and post your resumé so potential employers can see your credentials. You may also search thousands of listings by type of job and location. The positions are not specifically for people with disabilities but rather are listed by companies and organizations, including government agencies, that actively recruit and hire candidates with disabilities to create a diverse and inclusive workforce.
- **DO-IT: Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology**: DO-IT seeks to increase the success of people with disabilities in challenging academic careers in math and science. It is a collaboration between **UW Information Technology** and the Colleges of **Engineering** and **Education** at the University of Washington, with additional funding from the National



Science Foundation, the State of Washington, and the U.S. Department of Education.

- **Friends of Quinn:** Founded by Quinn Bradlee, filmmaker and author of *A Different Life*, a book about growing up with LDs, this online community offers resources and support for young adults with LD.
- **GettingHired:** This useful and free web portal enables job seekers with disabilities to connect with one another at no charge. It also features employers who are committed to hiring people with disabilities, service providers, and advocacy organizations. There are also up-to-date job listings, searchable by type of employment and location, as well as articles, blogs, and forums on career-related topics. Signing up is free.
- **Incight: Resources for Self-Empowerment:** Incight offers education, employment, independence, and networking programs with the goal of increasing the success of people with disabilities.
- **Job Accommodation Network (JAN):** This service, provided by the U.S. Department of Labor, is a comprehensive job accommodation resource. Their consultants offer one-on-one guidance on workplace accommodations, the ADA, and self-employment options for people with disabilities.

- ***Meeting the Challenge of Learning Disabilities in Adulthood:*** This book by Dr. Arlyn Roffman, an LD professional who has written for LD.org, encourages self-awareness and self-acceptance.
- **National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability (NCWD):** The NCWD/Youth is an organization that provides employment information for young adults with LD.
- **Occupational Outlook Handbook:** Access information from the Bureau of Labor Statistics on the top fields people are getting jobs in, fields that are expected to grow, and what jobs are available at your level of education and training.
- ***Self-Advocacy Skills for Students with Learning Disabilities: Making It Happen in College and Beyond:*** Author Henry B. Reiff reminds readers that the key to success after high school is being your own best advocate.
- ***Skills to Pay the Bills: Mastering Soft Skills for Workplace Success:*** Developed by the US Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy, this curriculum, designed for students with disabilities, focuses on developing skills such as communication, enthusiasm, and teamwork.



- **Transition Coalition:** Based at the University of Kansas's Department of Special Education, Transition Coalition helps youth with disabilities successfully make the transition from school to adult life by providing professional development training modules, networking tools, assessments, and links to other resources.

## Join Our Online Community

Besides checking out our website – [LD.org](http://LD.org) – there are lots of ways to stay current on LD issues and get great, free resources. Simply like us on [Facebook](#), follow us on [Twitter](#) and visit us on [Pinterest](#) to stay in touch.



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