



Interviewing Persons with Disabilities

In general, prepare and conduct your interview as you would with anyone. Put your subject at ease. Accept the fact that a disability exists; respect individuality and accept what is different. Be clear in your questioning. Be candid when you need to be. And ask for clarification of terms or issues when necessary. Relax - don't be embarrassed. Remember, persons with disabilities have a sense of humor just like you.

Also, all interview questions must be related to the essential functions of the position.

Interviewing etiquette

- It is appropriate to shake hands when introduced to a person with a disability. (People with limited hand use or who wear an artificial limb do shake hands.)
- Treat adults as adults. Address persons with disabilities by their first names only when calling everyone present by their first name.
- When talking with someone who has a disability, speak directly to that person rather than through a companion who may be along.
- Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use words that seem to relate to a disability. "See you soon," or "I've got to be running along."
- If you offer to help, wait until the offer is accepted. Then listen to or ask for instructions.
- Conduct interviews in a manner that emphasizes abilities, achievements and individual qualities.
- Avoid putting persons with disabilities on a pedestal. Conduct your interview as you would with anyone.
- Don't emphasize differences between people as this reinforces the "one of them" vs. "one of us" attitude barrier to acceptance of persons with disabilities in society.

When interviewing people with hearing losses

- You may need to get the person's attention by tapping gently on the shoulder, waving your hand, or using some similar physical signal.
- If you are interviewing someone with a partial hearing impairment, ask where it would be most comfortable for them to sit.
- If an interpreter is present, speak to the person being interviewed rather than to the interpreter.
- If the person is lip-reading, look directly at the interviewee. Speak slowly and clearly. Do not exaggerate your lip movements. Speak expressively because the person will rely on your facial expressions, gestures and body movements to understand you. (Note: It is estimated that only 3 out of 10 spoken words are visible on the lips.)
- Place yourself facing the light source and keep your hands away from your mouth when speaking.
- Shouting does not help and can be harmful. You may want to use written note.

When interviewing persons with visual impairments

- When greeting a person with a severe visual impairment, always identify yourself and introduce anyone else who might be present.
- When offering a handshake, say something like, "Shall we shake hands?"
- When offering seating, place the person's hand on the back or arm of the seat.
- Let the person know if you move or need to end the conversation.

When interviewing persons with speech difficulties

- Give your undivided attention when talking with someone who has difficulty speaking.
- Ask short questions that require short answers or a nod of the head when you can.
- Don't pretend to understand if you do not. Try rephrasing what you wish to communicate.

When interviewing persons using a wheelchair or crutches

- Don't lean on a person's wheelchair. The chair is a part of the body space of the person who uses it.
- DO NOT patronize people who use wheelchairs by patting them on the head. This is a sign of affection that should be reserved only for small children, and most of them don't like it either!
- When interviewing a person who uses a wheelchair or crutches for more than a few minutes, sit down or otherwise place yourself at that person's eye level to avoid stiff necks.
- Encourage people who use crutches or canes to keep them within easy reach.
- Make sure that the place where you plan to conduct the interview is accessible. Check the following:
 - Are there parking spaces reserved for persons with disabilities nearby?
 - Is there a ramped or step-free entrance?
 - Are there accessible bathrooms?
 - If the interview is not on the first floor, does the building have an elevator?
 - Are there water fountains low enough for a person in a wheelchair to use?

Be sure to notify the interviewee in advance if there are problems with your location. Discuss what to do and make alternate plans with the person you plan to interview.