Series 2 : CVs, Application Forms and Disability

Ebook 1 : Applying with a disability



APPLYING WITH A DISABILITY?

ACCOUNT FOR DIFFERENCES ON YOUR CV

THE NO-SWEAT GUIDE TO COMPLETING JOB APPLICATION FORMS AND ACCOUNTING FOR DISABILITY RELATED DIFFERENCES ON YOUR CV.

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INTRODUCTION

When completing a CV or application form, exactly the same principles apply for disabled applicants as they do for those without a disability. However, the difference is that you may need to explain certain elements of your application that relate specifically to your disability e.g. a gap in your education, lower academics or lack of work experience.

If you are prepared to be open and honest from the beginning, employers will take genuine mitigating circumstances relating to your disability into consideration and you will find it easier to request any support or adjustments you may need later on in the recruitment process.

In this ebook, we show you how to account for the following differences and present your experience positively on your CV and application form:

- A gap in your education
- Lower academics
- Lack of work experience

This is the first ebook in the CVs, Application Forms and Disability series.
Visit www.myplusstudentsclub.com for careers advice and more information on applying with a disability. Become a member on the website for free, in order to download more ebooks on topics such as being open with an employer and requesting adjustments in the recruitment process.



A GAP IN YOUR EDUCATION

If you have a disability or long-term health condition, or have acquired one, it is possible that you will have had to take time out from your education as a result. It is essential to account for gaps in your education rather than leave any period of time unaccounted for.

By taking a proactive approach to address this gap in your application and explain what you have done to develop your learning outside of a formal classroom setting, recruiters won't have to guess what you have been up to. Furthermore, you will have demonstrated attributes such as resilience and the motivation to excel, which are valuable traits that recruiters look for in candidates.

What to say to an employer:

Provide a short explanation of what has occurred and concentrate on the strategies you took to overcome the challenges you faced.

Example:

"During my second term at university I lost 50% of my vision in a short period of time. Obviously this was a very stressful time for me, and I decided to take some time out whilst my condition continued to change and I adapted to my new situation before returning to my studies.

During the two years that I took out , as well as intense medical treatment, I also worked part-time in a small law firm. My confidence returned during this time and I felt ready to return to university to start a new course in 2011. Not only have I participated fully in university life, I have also achieved academically as my exam results show."

When and where you can explain gaps in your education:

- **CVs.** You could either provide the information wherever it appears in the chronological order of your CV or include an additional paragraph either at the beginning or end or your CV.
- **Application forms.** You could either include the information wherever it appears in the chronological order of your work history or under the 'Mitigating Circumstances' or 'Additional Information' sections.
- **Covering Letters.** If you decide to provide the information in a covering letter keep it short.



LOWER ACADEMICS

Employers know that having a disability or long-term health condition may have prevented you from meeting certain criteria e.g. graduating with a 2:1, achieving higher marks for a module etc., and they will take genuine mitigating circumstances into account when screening your application.

If you do not inform an employer that you have mitigating circumstances and were unable to meet certain academic requirements due to your disability, you may risk being filtered out of the application process early. Allow your employer to make a fair assessment of your skills by explaining the facts succinctly and asking for your mitigating circumstances to be taken into consideration.

What to say to an employer:

You do not have to go into the details of your disability. Rather, focus on the facts and ask that the employer considers what you have achieved in the context of your disability.

Example:

"For several years, I have experienced anxiety and panic attacks when under severe stress. I experienced anxiety attacks during the exams for (MODULE) and (MODULE), resulting in a lower mark for these modules. Since I did not fail, I was ineligible to re-sit these exams. I trust that (FIRM NAME) will take this into consideration when reviewing my application."

When and where you can explain your mitigating circumstances:

- **CVs.** You could either include a paragraph at the beginning or end of your CV or provide relevant information at the appropriate point in the body of the CV; e.g. explain lower academic grades where the grades appear.
- **Application forms.** Most employers will provide space for you to explain any mitigating circumstances.
- **Covering Letters.** If you provide information about lower grades, you can ask an employer to take into account mitigating circumstances in your cover letter.

Speak to your university tutor or disability advisor

It's a good idea to talk to your personal tutor about your mitigating circumstances at the time. They can help ensure that your university takes them into account while marking your exams. An employer may subsequently ask for your permission to talk to your tutor. For example, the recruiter may wish to check whether you are considered to be of 2.1 calibre, if that is the standard that has been set for filtering applications.

LACK OF WORK EXPERIENCE

Employers often look for evidence of work experience in your application because holding down a job demonstrates that you can be proactive, reliable, trustworthy and hardworking. It can be harder for those with a disability or long-term health condition to have gained work experience. Employers will take this into consideration, providing you can still demonstrate these kinds of qualities through alternative means.

If you have never previously worked, it is only natural that an employer may have concerns about your ability to do so. If you have work experience it will be much easier for you to address your employer's apprehensions, so think broadly about the experiences you have had. Work experience can be related to the role you are applying for, or it could be unrelated; it could be paid or voluntary; challenging or menial.

What to say to an employer:

Use different examples to highlight a variety of competencies; you may also decide that drawing on your disability to demonstrate your strengths may be the most effective way of demonstrating what is being accessed.

Example:

"While my disability has, until now, made it challenging for me to obtain work experience in (FIRM'S INDUSTRY), I feel that in managing my disability I have developed and demonstrated certain competencies.

Managing my disability has specifically forced me to develop my communication and influencing skills as a result of having to work with service providers. I have also developed my ability to plan and organise as a result of coordinating my doctor's appointments around my university schedule. In addition, by working with my university's Disability Services, I have advanced my ability to work effectively in a team. These skills will transfer well to a career at (FIRM NAME), and demonstrate that I have much to offer."



Top Tips:

- If you have gaps in your education, provide a short explanation rather than leave any period of time unaccounted for.
- If you have genuine mitigating circumstances, state them.
- Get work experience. Holding down any job demonstrates that you can be proactive, reliable, trustworthy and hardworking.
- Understand your strengths. Highlight the additional strengths you have gained as a result of your disability.
- Think creatively about your skill set and why they make you an asset to an organisation.
- Be positive and see your disability as something that makes you unique. Never go for the sympathy vote.

AND FINALLY....

We hope this ebook has showed you how to account for elements of your application that relate specifically to your disability and given you the confidence to apply to your dream job.

For more advice and information, become a member on www.myplusstudentsclub.com for free to download ebooks on topics such as informing an employer about your disability and requesting workplace adjustments.