

Unit 6:

Postsecondary Disclosure... Why, When, What, to Whom, and How?

GOAL



The purpose of Unit 6 is to reiterate the need to disclose in order to get reasonable accommodations in college, at a university, in a career and technical school, or in an adult education center. In addition, this unit clearly answers five specific disclosure questions: Why, when, what, to whom, and how to disclose a disability in postsecondary settings. Terminology provided in this unit will help you better understand these questions. We strongly suggest that you read the discussion focusing on “why to disclose” on page 6-3.

TERMINOLOGY



You may know some of these words already, or you may just have heard them in passing. First, define these words as you understand them. Then check your definitions against the glossary that is located in the back of this workbook. The following terms are used in Unit 6:

Access	Disclosure script
Assistive technology	Postsecondary
Disability Support Services (DSS)	Responsibility
	Rights

Access _____

Assistive technology _____

Disability Support Services (DSS) _____

Disclosure script _____

Postsecondary _____

Responsibility _____

Rights _____

NOTES



WHY TO DISCLOSE IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION



The process of choosing a postsecondary institution of learning is quite challenging. There are many decisions you will need to make: where to study, what to study, how to study, whether to attend full-time or part-time, whether to live at home or on campus, and whether to commute from a distance or enroll in online study are just a few.

If you have a disability, you must also consider the supports and services that you may need to be successful in the postsecondary setting of your choice. Are these supports and services available to you if you require an accommodation? **Remember, accommodations at the postsecondary level (after you exit high school) are provided only when a student discloses his or her disability and requests accommodations.** Faculty and staff are not required to provide accommodations to students who have chosen not to disclose their disabilities.

Learning to disclose your disability-related needs effectively and developing an accommodation plan are extremely valuable skills. Effective disclosure skills require that you share information regarding your disability-related needs and also provide creative, practical suggestions for accommodations. Open communication with your professors and the disability services staff can facilitate the process of evaluating the effectiveness of your accommodations, and of making changes when efforts are not working.

Good planning is always important, but early planning is essential.

Again, this is where **informed decision-making** is critical. The more enlightened you are before you graduate from high school, the more questions you ask, and the more you talk with people in the post-secondary world, the more likely it is that you will be confident that the decisions you make are right for you.

Some reasons why you may choose to disclose your disability in a postsecondary setting include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Obtaining information about available supports and services;
- Discussing specific needs in order to identify adjustments necessary to the study environment;
- Discussing academic requirements and practical components of your chosen course of study, in addition to possible professional requirements;
- Receiving any necessary assistance with the transition from high school to postsecondary education;
- Ensuring that Disability Support Service professionals provide any needed training or awareness for faculty members and other staff to help you receive the best accommodations; and
- Ensuring that faculty members are familiar with and implement the accommodations you require to be successful in their classes.

Remember that it is not essential to divulge specific personal information about your disability. What is most important and helpful is to provide information about 1) how your disability affects your capacity to learn and study effectively, and 2) the environment, supports, and services you'll need in order to **access**, participate in, and

excel in your area of study. Although confidentiality is protected under both the ADA and Section 504, as a student with a disability you must determine your own personal privacy boundaries. **YOU** must decide what and how much information it is necessary to reveal in order to obtain the needed accommodations.

WHEN TO DISCLOSE IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION



It is important to think about the most appropriate time and place in which to disclose your disability in the postsecondary setting. The timing of your disclosure is important and can potentially have an impact on how you are perceived by others and what accommodations can be provided. There are four options for “when” you choose to disclose:

- **Prior to enrollment**

Usually you will meet with your instructors or disability support services coordinators prior to enrolling in class. At this time, be prepared to disclose your disability as well as plan for needed accommodations or begin to explore strategies for accommodations that will work for them and the instructors.

- **At the time of enrollment**

It is usually recommended that you inform your instructors of your needed accommodations at the beginning of a semester, or as soon as your disability is interfering with your progress in class.

- **During your course of study**

If you wait to disclose your disability until after classes have started, there may be additional considerations. For example, if you decide to disclose your disability and make a request for accommodations the day before an exam (an example of poor timing), the disclosure is stressful and accommodations are more difficult to arrange. If, on the other hand, you approach the instructor before the first class session to voice your concerns and propose potential accommodation strategies, then accommodations can be arranged in an organized, thorough manner with sufficient time to implement them. Everyone is more comfortable with this arrangement.

- **Never**

It is important to remember that if no accommodations are needed, or if you have made a decision to accommodate your potential needs personally (for example, by using a spell-check feature for English papers), then there is no need to disclose your disability.

WHAT INFORMATION TO DISCLOSE IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION



Remember that preparation is essential when planning to disclose your disability. Don't forget that it is unnecessary to disclose very detailed medical or personal information.

You may wish to present the following information to the disability services professionals, faculty members, and staff:

- General information about your disability;
- Why you've chosen to disclose your disability (i.e., its impact on your academic performance);
- The type of academic accommodations that have worked for you in the past (in high school);
- The type of academic accommodations you anticipate needing in the postsecondary setting;
- How your disability and other life experiences can affect your course of study positively.

Most importantly, keep the disclosure conversation focused on your abilities, not on your disability.

TO WHOM TO DISCLOSE IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION



It is essential that you disclose your disability only to those individuals who need to know. Sometimes, the person you choose to disclose your disability to, is determined by when you choose to disclose. The following list gives you examples of the people you might disclose your disability to at different times.

- **Prior to enrollment**, you might choose to disclose to the Disability Support Services staff, directly to faculty, or to an admissions officer.
- **At the time of enrollment**, you might choose to disclose directly on your application form or contact the Disability Support Services office.
- **During your course of study**, you might choose to contact your academic advisor or counselor, your professor, other teaching staff, or the Disability Support Services office.
- **When in doubt**, contact the trained professionals in the Disability Support Services office for guidance.

Throughout the process of disclosure and accommodation development, it is very important that you work closely and cooperatively with those individuals (such as faculty, counselors, Disability Support Service staff, and higher education administration) who can provide the supports and services.

When requesting accommodations, try to be

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Adapted from <<http://sites.uws.edu.au/rdlo/disclosure/education/prior.htm>>.



We've talked a great deal about the **rights** afforded to you as a person with a disability. It is also important to understand that, as a person with a disability, you have significant responsibilities to yourself, your instructors, and the Disability Support Services staff. Some of these rights and responsibilities are outlined in the chart below:

You have the right to	You have the responsibility to
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be treated fairly and in a non-discriminatory fashion. • Discuss your academic needs, supports, and accommodations in a non-judgmental setting. • Have information about your disability treated confidentially and respectfully. • Know what happens to personal information you choose to share with counselors, faculty, or staff. • Work collaboratively with staff to identify necessary supports for your success. • Obtain information about disability support services as well as physical and programmatic access at the institution of your choosing. • Be self-determined and practical. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate and fully understand the academic and practical requirements of your chosen course of study, including determining that this option matches your skills and abilities. • Recognize that disclosing on an application form or prior to enrollment does not eliminate your responsibility to contact Disability Support Services after you are enrolled or contact your professors for any needed accommodations. • Find out about options for accessing the institution of your choice. • Advise faculty and staff in a timely manner of your needs in relation to your disability, including accommodation, support, and information. • Understand that Disability Support Services staff or faculty may not be able to address your needs effectively if you do not disclose them in a timely manner. • Be self-determined and practical.

ACTIVITY:
COURSE FOR DISCLOSURE EXAMPLES



Read the following examples and determine each student’s course for disclosure. First determine whether or not it is necessary for the student to disclose his or her disability. Then think about the “why,” “when,” “what,” “to whom,” and “how” questions. Write your answers on the lines provided. If possible, share your answers with a group of your peers or classmates. **Remember: there are no “right” or “wrong” answers, because choosing to disclose is a personal and individual decision!**

1. Yvonne is considering a course of study in elementary education at a university in her city. She is sure it is the right course for her, and now needs to find out about the accessibility of the buildings on the campus she would like to attend.

Disclose? _____

Why? _____

When? _____

What? _____

To whom? _____

How? _____

2. Matthew has decided to study part-time for the first year of his coursework because he has found it very demanding to manage both his ongoing medical condition and full-time study at the same time.

Disclose? _____

Why? _____

When? _____

What? _____

To whom? _____

How? _____

3. Denise has been attending college for three weeks, and is already beginning to feel stressed. She has been unable to attend all of her lectures or labs due to difficulties with her medication. She has three large projects due in the next month and is fearful she won't be able to complete them.

Disclose? _____

Why? _____

When? _____

What? _____

To whom? _____

How? _____

4. Antonio uses CART (a word-for-word speech-to-text interpreting service). He's been accepted to a small university with limited knowledge of assistive technology.

Disclose? _____

Why? _____

When? _____

What? _____

To whom? _____

How? _____

ACTIVITY: MY PRACTICE SCRIPT



Research shows that having a disclosure “**script**” and practicing it with friends, teachers, relatives, and mentors can be of great benefit to you when the time actually comes to disclose. Most people find that it is easier to talk about the **impact** of having a disability rather than offering a formal or clinical definition.



For example, someone explaining that they have cerebral palsy could say,

“I have difficulty with fine motor skills. I write more slowly and with more difficulty than other people and become fatigued more easily. Consequently, I will need to use a computer to type essay tests or any other written assignments.”

It is also helpful to include some information relating to areas of strength.

Here is one example:

“I am able to use my strong verbal skills to contribute and share my ideas during class while I tape record the entire lecture. If I took notes during the lecture instead of participating in discussion, I would find it difficult to keep up with the discussion.”



To help you practice explaining your disability, write your explanation down. You may have to do this several times before it truly describes what you want to say, in a way that someone who knows very little about disabilities will understand. Use additional paper if needed.

Here are some questions and hints to think about while preparing your disclosure practice script:

- **Identify the limitations** or challenges you face in school because of your disability.
 - **Identify which accommodations** have worked best for you in the past and why.
 - **Consider how your disclosing can help the faculty or staff member help you** (that is, try to put yourself in their shoes).
 - **End the script with positive points.**
- Write about your **positive attributes or strengths** first.

Write your script on the following page.



