

DYSLEXIA: JOB INTERVIEWS

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Most people find job interviews daunting. If you are dyslexic (and/or dyspraxic), you will have extra worries: will you grasp exactly what your interviewers are asking; will you remember all the things you meant to say; will you be able to express your thoughts clearly under pressure; should you mention your dyslexic difficulties, and, if so, how should you talk about them? In this article I shall offer some suggestions for dealing pro-actively with these worries.

Preparing for the interview

It is essential to prepare well for an interview. You may not know exactly what questions you will be asked, but you can probably make a guess at the sort of subjects that will be of interest to the interview panel. These will probably include your previous job history, why you want this particular job, what talents you can bring to it, and your ambitions for the future. Interviewers often also ask about your ability to work in a team, your capacity to work under pressure, and your communication and leadership skills.

A day or so before the interview jot down a few notes to yourself on the points you want to make, and rehearse the interview in your mind. If possible, role-play the interview with a friend or family member. Practise walking confidently – but not jauntily – into a room and sitting composedly in a chair. Then practise walking out of a room in a dignified way. A job could be won or lost on the basis of your posture and manner.

During the interview

In the interview itself, make eye contact with the interviewers when you are introduced to them. If you don't understand one of their questions, try not to get flustered, but calmly ask them to repeat it. Don't feel you have to rush your replies; you will earn respect if you seem to be putting some thought into your answers. If they ask you a question to which you have already prepared an answer, don't recite the answer as if you are reading from a book, but try to speak naturally. If one of the interviewers seems unfriendly or aggressive, interpret this as being his/her problem – and rise above it.

At the end of the interview, you may be asked if you have questions or concerns you want to raise. Try to think of one or two, because if you just say 'no', that might seem as if you are

not taking much interest in the job. You could, for example, ask what opportunities the job would afford for further training. As far as possible, you need to engage with the interviewers in a mutually informative dialogue.

Talking about dyslexia

Some people prefer not to tell a potential employer that they are dyslexic. This may be because they think that this will 'put off' the employer, or because they don't think their difficulties are severe enough to matter, or because they haven't in fact realised they are dyslexic.

There is no easy answer to the question of whether or not it is to your advantage to inform a potential employer about your dyslexia. If you keep quiet about your difficulties that may help you get the job, but once in post, you will have to struggle alone with the difficulties without the benefit of help and support.

If you tell the employer about your dyslexia, there is a risk that this could lose you the job. However, if you get the job, then your employer would be legally obliged to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate your difficulties in the workplace. Adjustments could include funding an assessment and providing training.

Let's assume that, on your application form, you have mentioned the fact that you are dyslexic. When you go for the job interview, this will almost certainly be something that the interviewers will want to ask you about. You will, of course, have had the chance to think in advance about how to answer questions on this subject. In general, if you respond confidently, explaining the strategies you have in place to deal with your difficulties, then your dyslexia is unlikely to weigh heavily against you; but if you seem anxious or 'furtive' about your difficulties, then this could lose you the job. Try to talk more about your strengths and coping strategies than about your difficulties.

Reasonable adjustments at the application stage

Employers have an obligation to make adjustments for dyslexic difficulties during the process of job application and interview. So, for example, you could ask to be given the interview questions in writing in advance of the interview. Also, you could request that you be allowed to have some brief notes with you in the interview, explaining that this will help you to express yourself clearly. And remember: the fact you find an interview difficult doesn't mean

that you can't do a particular job – a clerical job, for example, doesn't depend on interview skills.

Case study: managing an interview:

Maureen, who was severely dyspraxic, was worried that, in her first interview with her new line manager, she would not be able to explain the nature of her difficulties and how they might affect her work. She took control of the situation by writing down clearly on one side of an A4 sheet her main difficulties, stating in each case what strategies she had for dealing with them, and how the employer could be helpful.

At the interview, when the line manager began to ask her about dyspraxia, Maureen spoke out in a confident - not anxious or demanding – way. She explained that she had felt worried she might fail to explain her problems clearly so she had made a written note of them, and she then handed this note to the manager. This had several beneficial effects: Maureen felt less anxious in the interview because she knew that, come what may, she would be able to get her message across. The manager was impressed with Maureen's efficiency and proactive attitude, and was grateful for the fact that he could now easily pass Maureen's information on to relevant colleagues. In this way Maureen used the interview itself to demonstrate how she could turn her weaknesses into strengths.

Further reading

For a general introduction:

Dyslexia in the Workplace: an Introductory Guide. Diana Bartlett and Sylvia Moody. Wiley Blackwell.

Self-help books:

Dyslexia: How to Survive and Succeed at Work. Sylvia Moody. Random House (Vermilion).

That's the way I think: dyslexia and dyspraxia explained. David Grant. David Fulton Books.

For employers

Dyslexia and Employment: a Guide for Assessors, Trainers and Managers.

Edited by Sylvia Moody. Wiley Blackwell.

Help organisations:

The British Dyslexia Association 0845 251 9002 www.bdadyslexia.org.uk

PATOSS 01386 712 650 patoss@worcs.ac.uk www.patoss-dyslexia.org

DANDA (dyspraxia/ADD support) www.danda.org.uk

Website with comprehensive information, and videos of dyslexic people speaking about their experiences of assessment and working life: www.workingwithdyslexia.com