

# EMPOWERING NEURODIVERSITY AT WORK



## Understanding Reasonable Adjustments

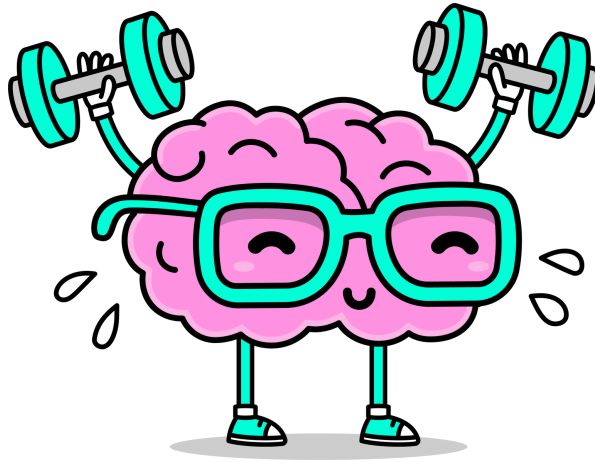
- **Reasonable Adjustments** are changes made by employers to accommodate employees with disabilities, ensuring they have equal access to employment.
  - Examples include **flexible working hours, assistive technology, working from home, and job restructuring.**
  - **Legal rights:** Under the **Equality Act 2010**, employers are required to provide reasonable adjustments to avoid disadvantage for disabled employees.
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## Access to Work

This UK government program provides **financial and practical support** for disabled individuals to thrive in the workplace.

- **Supports include:** Specialist equipment (e.g., ergonomic keyboards, noise-canceling headphones), support workers, and help with travel costs.
- **Eligibility:** You must be a UK resident, aged 16+, and in or starting paid work.
- You **can apply before you start** employment. The **waiting times** for Access to Work to make contact are **up to 6 weeks**. If you **apply whilst in employment** the **current wait** is **6 months**.
- Curiously Divergent **can assist** in the **application** process for this grant.



## Identifying Strengths

One of the most important aspects of preparing for job applications and interviews is recognising your unique strengths. Neurodivergent individuals often have skills and qualities that set them apart in the workplace. Identifying these strengths will not only help you build confidence but will also allow you to clearly communicate your value to potential employers. Below are strategies to help you identify your key strengths and how to showcase them effectively.

- **Key skills of neurodivergent individuals** that employers value include:
  - **Problem-solving**
  - **Creativity**
  - **Attention to detail**
  - **Adaptability**
  - **Critical thinking**

Your strengths don't always need to be tied to a specific job role or task. Many of your core skills can be transferred across different industries and roles. These transferable skills are highly valuable because they can be applied to a wide range of work situations. Here are some examples of transferable skills you may have:

- **Problem-solving:** Think about times when you've successfully resolved issues or overcome challenges. Employers value candidates who can think on their feet and offer solutions.
- **Communication:** Whether it's written or verbal, effective communication is crucial in most job roles. Reflect on situations where you've conveyed complex information clearly or worked as part of a team.
- **Time management and organisation:** If you've developed techniques to manage your time, meet deadlines, or stay organised in a way that works for you, these are valuable skills that many employers look for.
- **Collaboration and teamwork:** Reflect on how you've worked with others to achieve shared goals. Even if you prefer working independently, think about how you can contribute to a team.



## Reflecting on Past Experiences

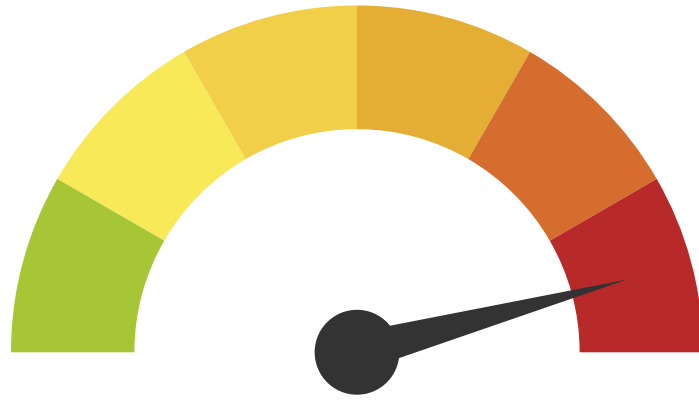
One of the best ways to identify your strengths is by reflecting on your previous experiences—whether from work, education, volunteering, or personal projects. Consider the following questions to help pinpoint your strengths:

- **What tasks or activities do you enjoy the most?** Think about the moments when you felt engaged or in your "flow." The activities you naturally gravitate towards often reflect your strengths.
- **When have you received positive feedback?** Consider times when colleagues, supervisors, or even friends and family have complimented your abilities. This feedback can highlight areas where you excel.
- **What challenges have you overcome?** Reflect on challenges or obstacles that you've managed to navigate successfully. Your approach to overcoming those difficulties can highlight key strengths such as resilience, problem-solving, or creativity.
- **What are you proud of achieving?** Reflect on your proudest moments in your career, education, or personal life. What strengths did you use to achieve those outcomes?

## Using Strengths in Job Applications and Interviews

Identifying your strengths is just the first step—effectively communicating them in job applications and interviews is crucial. Here's how to use your strengths to your advantage:

- **On your CV:** Make sure your key strengths are clear in both your **skills section** and **job descriptions**. Highlight how these strengths helped you achieve specific outcomes in past roles.
    - Example: "Demonstrated exceptional attention to detail by leading the quality control process, reducing errors by 30% over six months."
  - **In your cover letter:** Use the cover letter to expand on your strengths. Show how they align with the company's needs and the role you're applying for. Make it clear why your unique strengths make you the perfect candidate.
    - Example: "My ability to think creatively and solve complex problems is a key reason I'm excited about the opportunity at [Company Name]. In my previous role, I developed a new approach to project management that saved my team 10 hours of work per week."
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## Managing Hypersensitivity and Hyposensitivity at Work

Neurodivergent individuals may experience **hypersensitivity** or **hyposensitivity** to sensory stimuli, which can affect their comfort and performance in the workplace. Here are examples of how these sensitivities can impact you:

- **Hearing:**
  - **Hypersensitive:** Loud noises or busy environments, like a bustling office or cafeteria, may feel overwhelming and make concentration difficult.
  - **Hyposensitive:** You might not notice important sounds like a colleague calling your name in a noisy setting.
- **Sight:**
  - **Hypersensitive:** Bright lights, such as overhead office lighting, can cause discomfort or headaches.
  - **Hyposensitive:** You may prefer brighter environments to stay focused or might not notice subtle changes in light.
- **Touch:**
  - **Hypersensitive:** Certain fabrics or physical sensations, like a handshake, might feel too intense or uncomfortable.
  - **Hyposensitive:** You might not notice discomfort from clothing or prefer stronger physical contact, like a firm hug.
- **Smell:**
  - **Hypersensitive:** Strong odors, such as perfumes or food smells in the office, can be overwhelming and even nauseating.
  - **Hyposensitive:** You might not notice strong smells at all, like burnt food or cleaning chemicals.
- **Taste:**
  - **Hypersensitive:** Certain food textures or flavors (especially spicy foods) may be overwhelming.
  - **Hyposensitive:** You might need to add extra seasoning to taste food or prefer strong flavors that others might find too intense.

### How to Manage Sensory Sensitivities:

- **Request reasonable adjustments** to manage sensory challenges, such as:
  - Noise-canceling headphones for auditory sensitivity.

- Adjusting lighting or seating away from bright or flickering lights.
  - Bringing sensory aids like fidget tools to help focus.
  - Asking for flexible working locations (e.g., working remotely or in a quieter space).
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## Job Applications and CV Writing

Crafting a strong job application and CV is essential for standing out to employers, especially when navigating the competitive job market. Here are key strategies to help you effectively highlight your skills, and examples of reasonable adjustments you can request to make the application process more accessible.

### Highlight Your Unique Strengths

- **Neurodiversity often brings unique strengths** that are highly valued by employers, such as:
  - **Problem-solving skills:** You may excel at identifying creative solutions to complex challenges.
  - **Attention to detail:** Many neurodivergent individuals are known for their precision and thoroughness in completing tasks.
  - **Adaptability:** The ability to navigate changing environments or multi-task effectively can be a major asset in a range of roles.
  - **Critical thinking:** You may bring a fresh perspective to situations, which can lead to innovative approaches and improvements.

Focus on these strengths in your CV and cover letter, and tailor your applications to showcase how your neurodiversity makes you an ideal fit for the role.

### Tailor Your CV for Each Job

- **Customise your CV for each application** by focusing on the specific skills and experiences that are most relevant to the job you're applying for.
  - **Use the job description** as your guide. Identify key skills the employer is looking for and highlight how your own experience aligns with those requirements.
  - **Address gaps or challenges proactively:** If there are gaps in your employment history, explain them briefly and focus on the positive steps you've taken during that time (e.g., further

training, voluntary work, or self-directed projects).

For example, if the job description mentions "attention to detail" or "problem-solving skills," provide examples from your experience where you've demonstrated these traits.

## Use Keywords

- **Pay attention to keywords in the job description** and use them in your CV. Many employers use **Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS)**, which scan for specific terms related to the job. Including these keywords will increase the chances of your application being noticed.
  - For example, if the job requires "project management experience," ensure that your CV clearly highlights any relevant experience with project management.

## Quantify Your Achievements

- Don't just list responsibilities—**show the impact** you've made by quantifying your achievements. This demonstrates how effective you've been in previous roles and makes your application stand out.
  - For example, instead of saying, "Increased efficiency," you could say, "Increased team efficiency by 20% through process optimisation."
  - Or instead of "Managed a team," try "Managed a team of 10, achieving a 30% increase in project completion rate within the first quarter."

## Proofread Carefully

- **Check for errors:** Even small mistakes on your CV or application can create a negative impression. Take the time to proofread carefully.
  - Use tools like **Grammarly** to help catch spelling, tone of voice or grammar mistakes.
  - Consider asking a friend, mentor, or family member to review your CV and offer feedback.

## Reasonable Adjustments for the Job Application Process

As a neurodivergent individual, you are entitled to request **reasonable adjustments** during the application process to ensure you can apply and interview on an equal footing with other candidates. Some adjustments you can request include:

- **Alternative formats for job postings:** If you struggle with reading long blocks of text, you can request that the job description or application materials be provided in a more accessible format, such as **audio**, **larger text**, or **screen reader-compatible files**.
- **Additional time to complete assessments:** If the job application process involves tests or timed assessments, you can request extra time or breaks to allow you to perform at your best.
- **Simplified application forms:** If you find online forms difficult to navigate or process, ask the employer if they can provide a simpler version of the application form or an alternative way to apply, such as by email or over the phone.
- **Clarity on the process:** You can request more information on the application process, such as knowing what steps will follow the submission (e.g., assessments, interviews) so that you can prepare adequately. This helps reduce anxiety and uncertainty about what comes next.

## Reasonable Adjustments for Your CV

If preparing a CV is challenging for you, there are adjustments and strategies that can help:

- **Simplified or alternative CV formats:** Ask if the employer will accept alternative CV formats, such as a portfolio, bullet-point list, or video CV, that better suits your communication style.
- **Use of assistive technology:** If you use assistive technology to write or format your CV (e.g., dictation software, screen readers, or text-to-speech tools), be sure the file format is compatible with the employer's application system. You can also request the employer to accept submissions in formats that your technology supports.
- **Support from job coaches:** If you work with a neurodiversity coach or career advisor, they may help you create a tailored CV and cover letter that highlights your strengths. You can also ask for feedback on your CV from trusted mentors or support networks. Scope offer support for CV writing.



## Job Applications – Highlighting Your Skills

When writing your CV or job application, focus on **transferable skills** that can be used in multiple roles. This is especially important if you are looking to switch industries or try a new type of work. Here are some key transferable skills you may wish to highlight:

- **Communication:** Highlight any experience in written or verbal communication, especially if it is relevant to the role.
- **Teamwork:** Mention situations where you successfully collaborated with others to complete projects or resolve issues.
- **Adaptability:** Include examples where you had to adapt to change or learn new skills quickly.
- **Problem-solving:** Show how you can assess challenges and come up with creative or effective solutions.

## Tailoring Your Cover Letter

Your cover letter is an opportunity to personalise your application and explain why you're excited about the specific role and company.

- **Use your cover letter to explain your strengths** in more detail and how they align with the role.
  - If relevant, you can mention **any adjustments** that you may require in the job itself, but this is entirely your choice. You can choose to address this later in the interview stage if you prefer.
  - **Customise the cover letter for each job** by linking your experience directly to the company's mission or goals. Show them why you're a good fit for their team.
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## Interview Preparation

Interviews can be intimidating, especially if you're unsure of what to expect. However, with the right preparation, you can approach interviews with confidence and effectively demonstrate your skills. Below are key strategies to help you prepare, along with specific considerations for neurodivergent individuals.



### Research the Company and Job Role

- Familiarise yourself with the company: Before the interview, thoroughly research the company's mission, values, and culture. Check their website, social media pages, and employee reviews on platforms such as Glassdoor.
- Understand the job specification and description: Carefully read the job description to identify the key skills and experiences the employer is looking for. Focus on how your strengths align with the specific responsibilities of the role.
  - Make a list of the key points in the job description and think about examples from your experience that demonstrate how you meet those requirements.

### Practice Interview Questions

- Rehearse with a trusted friend or mentor: Practising your answers with someone you trust can help you become more comfortable. You can also ask for feedback to improve your responses.
- Use notes if needed: It's perfectly acceptable to bring notes or flashcards into the interview, especially if they help you remember key points or calm your nerves. You can jot down the main points about your skills and examples you want to highlight.



## Request Adjustments

As a neurodivergent individual, you can request adjustments to help you perform at your best during the interview. Some adjustments you might consider include:

- **Requesting questions in advance:** This allows you time to prepare thoughtful answers and reduces anxiety during the interview.
- **Asking for extra time:** You can request additional time for processing or answering questions, especially if the interview is timed or involves technical tasks.
- **Bringing notes:** As mentioned, taking notes into the interview is a great way to help you stay on track and refer back to key points.
- **Clarifying questions:** Don't hesitate to ask the interviewer to repeat or rephrase a question if it seems unclear. This is especially helpful for avoiding misunderstandings, particularly with vague or open-ended questions.

## If an Employer Doesn't Provide Adjustments

- Unfortunately, not all employers may be accommodating or responsive to your requests for adjustments. It's important to remember that if an employer refuses to provide the reasonable adjustments you need to perform at your best, **don't take it personally**. This is a reflection on the employer, not you.
- **Respect for your unique needs** is essential for a supportive and inclusive workplace. If a company is unwilling to make these adjustments, it shows that they are not fully respecting or accepting your individuality.
- In this case, **add them to your "Employer Disqualification List"**: A mental or physical list of companies you may choose not to work for in the future. This helps ensure that you're pursuing roles with employers who will value your strengths and support you as your authentic self.
- **Stay focused on finding inclusive employers** who see the value in your neurodivergent traits and are willing to accommodate your needs. You deserve to work for a company that respects and empowers you.

## Ambiguity in Interview Questions

Some interview questions can be broad or ambiguous. For example, the question, **"Tell us about yourself"**, doesn't mean giving a full personal history. It's an opportunity to explain how your skills, experience, and strengths align with the job description.

- When answering this question, **focus on your professional journey**:
  - **Structure your answer** to cover:
    - **Your background** (what jobs or education prepared you for this role),
    - **Key skills** you've gained that match the job requirements,
    - **Why you're excited about this role and how you can contribute to the company.**
  - Example: "I have 3 years of experience in project management, where I've developed strong organisational and leadership skills. In my last role, I led a project that improved our team's efficiency by 25%, which I see is a key aspect of this position at your company."

## Practise Answering Common Interview Questions

While every interview will be different, there are a few common questions you can prepare for:

### Five Common Interview Questions:

1. **"Tell me about yourself."**
  - Remember, this question is asking how your experience and skills align with the job, not a personal life story. Tailor your answer to highlight your professional journey and relevant strengths.
2. **"Why do you want to work here?"**
  - Demonstrate that you've researched the company and connect its values or mission to your own career goals.
3. **"What are your strengths and weaknesses?"**
  - Focus on strengths that align with the job (e.g., problem-solving, attention to detail) and frame your weaknesses as areas you're actively working to improve.
4. **"Tell me about a time you faced a challenge and how you overcame it."**
  - Use the **STAR method** (Situation, Task, Action, Result) to structure your answer. Highlight a specific challenge, what you did to solve it, and the positive outcome.
5. **"Where do you see yourself in five years?"**
  - Share your career aspirations in a way that aligns with the company's goals. You can also emphasise your commitment to growth and learning in the field.

### After the Interview

- **Follow up with a thank-you email:** Within 24 hours of the interview, send a polite thank-you note to the interviewer. Use this opportunity to briefly reiterate your interest in the role and mention any relevant qualifications that align with what was discussed during the interview.

### Extra Tips for Interview Success

- **Prepare your own questions:** At the end of the interview, you'll often be given a chance to ask questions. Use this opportunity to enquire about the team, work culture, or next steps in the hiring process.
  - **Manage interview anxiety:** It's natural to feel nervous before an interview. Practise deep breathing techniques or grounding exercises to help calm your nerves beforehand.
  - **Bring your adjustments:** Whether it's fidget tools, a notepad, or headphones, make sure you bring whatever helps you stay focused and comfortable during the interview.
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## Disclosure of Neurodiversity in the Workplace

Deciding whether to disclose your neurodiversity or disability in the workplace is a deeply personal decision, and there is no right or wrong answer. Here are some key points to consider:



### 1. It's Your Choice

- **Disclosing is entirely voluntary.** You are not legally required to disclose your neurodiversity unless you feel it is beneficial for securing reasonable adjustments.
- Consider **your comfort level** and the specific job or work environment. For example, if you feel your neurodiversity is a key strength in certain areas (like problem-solving or creativity), you may want to share it with potential employers.



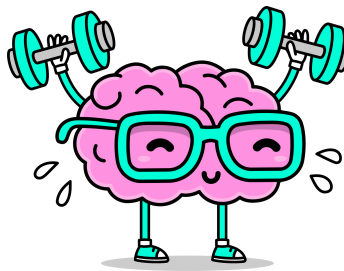
### 2. Timing Your Disclosure

- Choose an appropriate moment during the job application or interview process. Here are a few key times you might consider:
  - **During the application:** Some employers encourage disclosure in applications to offer accommodations early, especially if they are a **Disability Confident Employer**.
  - **During the interview:** If your neurodiversity relates to the role or helps explain why certain reasonable adjustments will enhance your performance, you may decide to mention it during the interview. This often works best once rapport has been established.
  - **After hiring:** If you are unsure about disclosing during the application or interview, you can wait until after you've been hired. Some people choose to disclose when they realize they need adjustments to thrive in their new role.



### 3. Be Prepared to Explain

- **If you choose to disclose**, be prepared to explain your neurodiversity in a clear and confident manner.
- Focus on how it **affects your work** and highlight **any accommodations** you might need to do your job effectively. For instance:
  - “I thrive in quieter environments, so having access to noise-canceling headphones would help me stay focused.”
  - “I have ADHD, which means I can bring creative solutions to challenges. However, I sometimes benefit from flexible deadlines or written instructions to keep me on track.”



### 4. Focus on Strengths

- When disclosing, always emphasize your **unique strengths**. Neurodivergent individuals often bring valuable skills to the workplace, such as **creative problem-solving**, **attention to detail**, or **out-of-the-box thinking**.
- You can say something like, “My neurodiversity gives me a unique perspective, and I excel in areas like critical thinking and innovation.”



### 5. Requesting Reasonable Adjustments

- Disclosing your neurodiversity enables you to **request reasonable adjustments**. You could mention adjustments that make your work easier, such as:
  - **Flexible working hours** or **remote working**.
  - **Assistive technology**, like speech-to-text software or ergonomic equipment.

- **Modified communication methods**, such as receiving meeting notes ahead of time or having instructions in writing.



## 6. Legal Protection

- Under the **Equality Act 2010**, you have a right to **reasonable adjustments** in the workplace. Employers are required to make these changes to support your work, even if you haven't disclosed your neurodiversity before starting the job. However, disclosing can sometimes speed up the process of obtaining the accommodations you need.

## 7. Disclosure as a Positive Indicator

- In some work environments, particularly those that prioritise **diversity and inclusion**, disclosing neurodiversity can be seen as a positive. Employers who are part of programs like the **Disability Confident Scheme** often value employees' diverse experiences and perspectives, and disclosing can create an open, supportive dialogue.



## Workplace Culture

A positive workplace culture is key to thriving. Look for companies that value **diversity, inclusion, and accessibility**.

- **Check for these values** in the company's mission statement, company website for examples of diversity, inclusion and accessibility, articles online or employee reviews on sites like Glassdoor.
- **Disability Confident Employers:** Look for companies that are part of the **Disability Confident Scheme**. This program encourages employers to take steps to support disabled employees and create an inclusive workplace.

- Companies participating in this scheme are committed to making reasonable adjustments, providing accessible interviews, and ensuring inclusive work environments.
  - When interviewing, feel free to ask if the company is a **Disability Confident Employer**, as this can be a sign of their commitment to supporting neurodivergent and disabled employees.
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## Building Your Support Network

- **Find your "Support Squad"**: A strong network of mentors, career coaches, disability advocates, and other supportive individuals is essential.
  - Some workplaces offer support networks for groups like neurodivergent employees, women, or other underrepresented identities.

Any questions please email Katie at [info@curiouslydivergent.co.uk](mailto:info@curiouslydivergent.co.uk)