

Fulfilling Your Potential

A guide for autistic people to
find meaningful employment,
using your strengths and talents



Terms

This guide is for autistic people without learning disabilities. It includes people who are neurodiverse in other ways, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia and dyspraxia.

For ease of reading, in the guide, we use the term 'autistic people'.

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Summary

This guide encourages you to reflect on these key areas:



1. Strengths

What I, and people around me, think that I am best at, and might do better than most other people.



2. Search

Finding the job that matches my talents and will give me the most meaning.



3. Strategy

How to secure the right opportunity and to make it work for me.

After reviewing the benefits of employment, this guide takes you through five steps:

1

Exploring your skills and qualities

2

Looking at key routes to find the right job

3

Applying for and securing employment

4

Preparing for your workplace experience

5

Developing extra skills that you might need



Employment

What are the benefits of employment?

Being a worker means having a contract to do work for a financial reward or a benefit in kind. An employee works under a contract that sets out their: employment conditions; rights; responsibilities; and duties.

Good employment, with the right support and development, offers you the chance to:



- 1 Have stability, security and belonging
- 2 Do what you do best every day
- 3 Build your confidence and self-esteem
- 4 Develop as a person
- 5 Have a clear purpose
- 6 Make a positive difference to society
- 7 Make new friends
- 8 Develop your skills, knowledge and experience
- 9 Open up opportunities to develop your career
- 10 Have more money to save or spend



Strengths

What I, and people around me, think that I am best at, and might do better than most people.

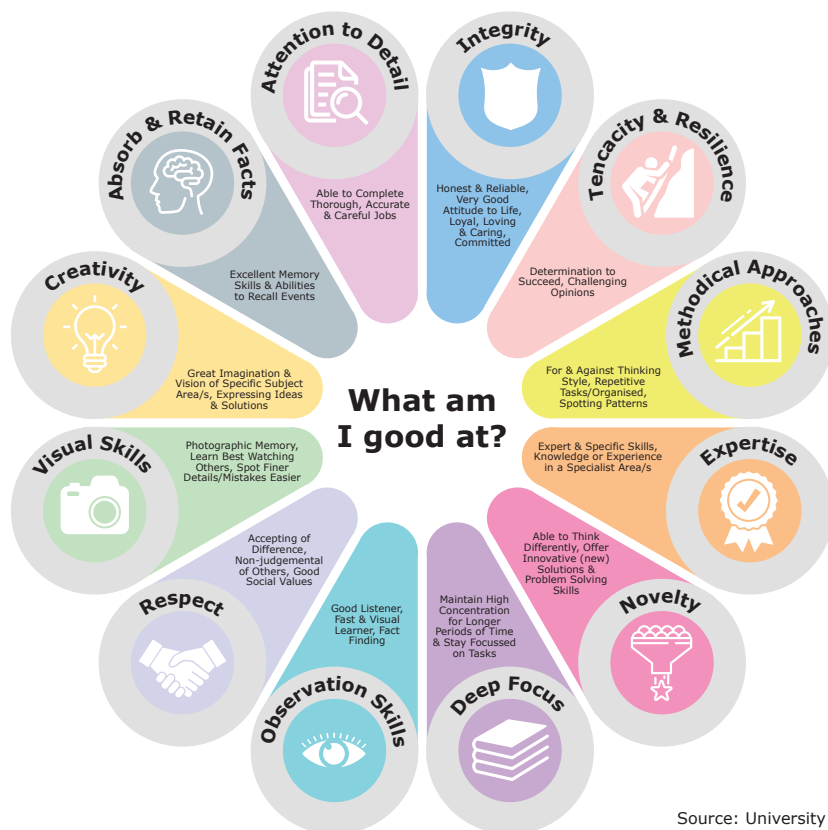
1

Exploring your skills and qualities

What are my skills and qualities?

Which of these qualities do you, and people around you who you trust, think that you are best at, and might do better than most other people?

Choose 3-5 qualities that best describe you.



Source: University of Leeds



Search

Finding the job that matches my talents and will give me the most meaning.

2

Looking at key routes to find the right job

Where can I get careers advice?

To guide you, you might find careers advice from these sources:

Schools, Colleges and Universities



Careers Advisors



Career Advice Organisations



How can I find my ideal job?

With your skills and qualities, there is a range of key routes that you can use to find the right employment.

Other than people you already know, some types of help and support are:



Autism Organisations

- Finding accessible job opportunities
- Preparing for job selection processes
- Getting resources to prepare for the workplace



Work Experience and Placements

- Getting a deeper understanding of the workplace
- Obtaining practical experience
- Developing work-related skills



Internet and Social Media

- Exploring a wide range of choices
- Identifying jobs matching your strengths and skills
- Increasing relevant contacts and support



Recruitment Agencies

- Improving CVs, applications and interviews
- Raising awareness of jobs available
- Matching you to suitable job opportunities



Fairs and Networking

- Meeting directly with employers
- Discovering more about jobs available
- Advising on making the right choice



Work and Skills Services

- Matching you to suitable job opportunities
- Supporting with CVs and applications
- Linking to work placements and job trials



Strategy

How to secure the right opportunity and to make it work for me.

3

Applying for and securing employment

How can I apply for a job?

Information about a specific job and what is required are usually found in two key documents.

If the job is advertised, the role and requirements will also be summarised in the job advertisement.

Job Description	Details the purpose, tasks and responsibilities
Person Specification	Profiles the essential and desirable skills, competencies, knowledge and experience required, and indicates how these will be assessed

You do not need to have everything in the person specification. Consider applying if you have 80% or more of its contents.

You might be asked to apply in one or more of these different ways:

CV (curriculum vitae)



Cover Letter



Personal Statement



Application Form



If you are asked to complete any of these, consider these suggestions:



- Make sure that you have enough time before the deadline. You can then relax and take breaks if you need to.
- What is important to the people who will read your application.
- Be clear about what impression you want to give.
- What will make your application stand out from others.
- Relate your information and answers to the person specification. Show how you meet each requirement, using facts and examples.
- Read all of the documents before filling your application. Follow any instructions or guidance provided.
- Make sure that your document is neat and easy to read.
- Complete all sections and answer every question.
- Keep your information clear and concise. Avoid confusing, irrelevant or repeat answers. Stay within any limits on length of answers.
- Check that your spelling and grammar are all correct.
- Keep a copy of your application to refer to later in the process.

What help and support is available?

Possible sources of help and support include:

- asking someone you trust to read through and comment on your application before submitting
- the internet to find different ways of wording answers
- asking your potential employer for any special arrangements that you need to complete your application, including alternative formats such as audio
- websites or helplines of autism-related organisations
- Citizens Advice or welfare rights services if you have queries on benefits

Should I say that I am autistic?

You might be wary of telling the employer that you are autistic and of their possible reaction. You will need to make your own judgement, but it is generally better to be open.

Check if the organisation actively encourages disclosure. If you decide to tell the organisation, it gives them the chance to support you through the application process and to make any reasonable adjustments that you request.

How can I prepare for practical assessments?

You might be asked to do practical assessments, such as:

Exercises or Tests



Practical Tasks



Work Trials



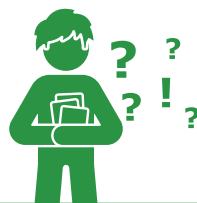
If so, remember to:

- check where the assessment will be held, whether physical or online
- ask for clear instructions beforehand and throughout the assessment
- if you can, practice and rehearse the tasks in advance

How can I prepare for an interview?

You might be invited to an interview, involving questions and answers or a discussion. If so, try to be your real self and remember that it is as much an opportunity for you to assess the organisation as it is for them to assess you.

To prepare for your interview, consider these pointers:



Preparation

- What is important to the people who will be interviewing you.
- Be clear how to give the impression that you want.
- What will make your interview stand out from others.
- Read through the job information before the interview.
- Research and learn about the organisation before the interview.
- Ask if you can have the interview questions before the day.
- If you need any particular arrangements or reasonable adjustments, ask the organisation for these as early as possible.
- Contact the organisation if you have any queries or concerns.
- You might want to practice a mock interview with someone you trust.

Practical Arrangements



- Check when, where and how the interview will take place.
- Plan to arrive 10-15 minutes before the appointed interview time.
- Do a practice journey to the location before the day.
- Have contact details, in case you are delayed or have a problem.

Appearance



- Appear clean, neat and dressed appropriately for the particular job.
- Turn off your phone and other devices before the interview.
- Bring a pen and paper to make any notes, if you need to.
- Do not arrive chewing gum or drinking coffee, tea or water. You could bring some water with you, in case you need it.
- Adopt a good posture – try to sit straight and stay still.

Interview



- Listen carefully to each question. If you do not understand, ask the interviewer to rephrase it, so you know what they want.
- Take a few seconds to think before you answer a question. Refer to any notes that you have made in advance.
- Keep your answers clear, concise and to the point.
- Tell the panel briefly how your passions, skills, knowledge and experience fit what they are looking for.
- If you need a break at any point, ask for one.
- If you are struggling with eye contact, you could look just above the person's eyes, or glance occasionally at your notes, the floor or something else in the room.

At the End



- You might be asked for any questions that you have.
- Prepare a few key questions before the interview that show your interest in the job and in the organisation.
- Ask how you can get feedback, whatever the outcome.
- Thank the other people for holding the interview with you.

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Preparing for your workplace experience

What can I expect from my induction?

Induction should help you to become familiar with the organisation and to settle into your job and working environment. Induction takes different lengths of time for different jobs.

Key things that you should expect during induction are:



Pre-employment

The organisation should send you details of when to start, the conditions of your employment, and what information it needs from you.



Tour and Facilities

On your first day, someone should guide you around the workplace, show you its facilities, and tell you about places nearby, such as shops and parks.



Health and Safety

The employer must provide you with the information, instruction and training needed for health and safety. This should include fire safety and first aid.



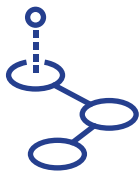
Policies and Procedures

The organisation should make you aware of its key policies and procedures. This should include legal requirements, such as safeguarding.



Terms and Conditions

Someone should take you through your terms and conditions of employment, and make sure that you understand them.



Organisation and Culture

Someone should tell you about the history of the organisation, what it does, and describe its values and culture – its customs, behaviours and practices.



Your Job Role

You should be given a clear outline of your role, its requirements, and how it fits with other people in your team. This should include any essential training.



Equipment

You should be shown how to use safely the equipment and tools you need to do your job effectively.



What is the workplace experience like?

Each workplace has its own way of doing things. Make your manager and colleagues aware of your strengths and needs, and ask about theirs. They can then make arrangements and reasonable adjustments to include you, make you comfortable and enable you to do your job as well as possible.

After a while, your manager should assess how you are settling in, review your progress, and agree with you any areas for your learning and development.

How might my employer support me?

What an employer can do to support you will vary with their size and resources. The range of possibilities includes:

- making adjustments that are reasonable for the employer to do
- providing a suitable working environment
- enabling flexible working
- allowing hybrid or home working
- improving staff awareness and knowledge of autism
- giving clear instructions and requests
- clear, constructive feedback
- regular performance review
- supplying specialist equipment
- giving good notice of new changes
- adjusting light, sound and temperature controls
- quiet areas

- arranging a colleague as a buddy for support
- enabling or avoiding lone working
- supporting travel planning
- providing learning and training
- engaging with external support for autistic people
- giving sensitive but direct feedback
- offering reassurance in stressful situations
- job carving: adjusting roles to match individual skill sets
- enabling short breaks during work time
- sharing your preferences/needs with colleagues (with consent)
- apps or timetables to structure work days

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Developing extra skills that you might need

How can I manage anxiety about change?

Most people feel some anxiety about change. Some people find it useful to think of it as excitement instead.

You can ask your employer to tell you about any planned changes as early as possible. You can then talk through any concerns and find solutions together.

How can I manage money and transport?



Money:

To budget and organise your money effectively, you might set up online or mobile banking with your bank or your building society.



Transport:

When thinking about travel to and from work, or during your work day, use travel planning tools. There are plenty of options online. You could also do practice runs for journeys that are new to you.

If you travel by public transport, purchase tickets in advance from:

Ticket Offices and Pay Points



Ticket Machines



Online or Mobile Apps



When travelling, pay attention to timetables and information boards for details of journeys and any changes. If you have any queries or concerns, ask staff at transport venues.



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