

# Accessible Interviews

In the Library Workplace

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# Nice to Meet You!

- MLIS student at UBC, graduating in May 2025
- Future academic librarian who loves research and writing
- Diagnosed with Autism as an undergraduate student
  - My perspective comes from high masking and late diagnosis



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project?

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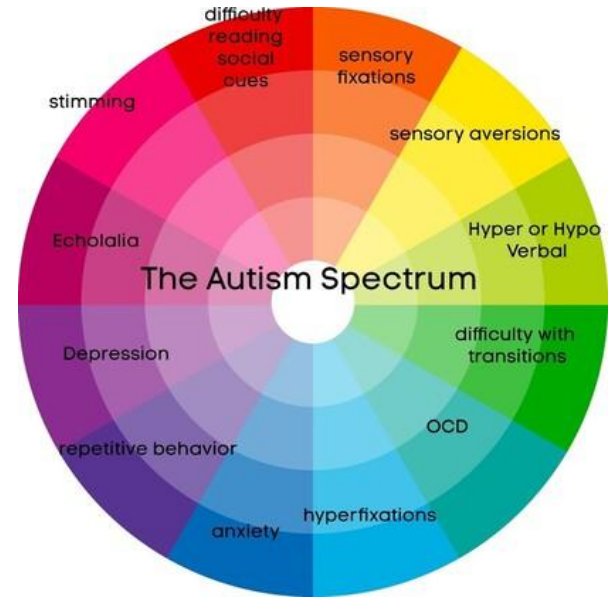
# What is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

“A developmental disability that affects how we experience the world around us” (Autistic Self Advocacy Network, n.d.)

Common traits:

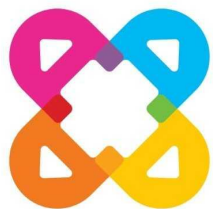
- Communication and socialization differences
- Sensory processing differences
- Differences in how we think, like rigid thinking, intense interests, and reliance on routine
- Motor skills and coordination differences

People of colour, women, and gender-diverse people are commonly undiagnosed or misdiagnosed



Tree of Life Autism Resource Center

# Autistic-Led Organizations



**AUTISM**  
**CANADA**  
**AUTISME**

See The Spectrum Differently  
Le spectre autrement



**ASAN**  
**AUTISTIC SELF ADVOCACY NETWORK**

<https://www.autismcanada.ca/>

“Advocate for and support individuals on the Autism Spectrum, their families, and caregivers living in Canada”

<https://autisticadvocacy.org/about-asan/>

“Advance the principles of the disability rights movement” and “empower autistic people across the world to take control of our own lives”

# Accessible Job Interviews in the Library Workplace

A guide for library workplaces seeking to  
hire autistic and neurodivergent employees

# A Toolkit for Accessible Interviews



Originally created for UBC's Progressive and Radical Information Work course, the toolkit is [available online via British Columbia Library Association.](#)

# Toolkit goals

1. Reduce barriers to employment for autistic people
2. Help libraries understand how to create more accessible interviews
3. Inspire open conversation about autistic experiences with library employment

# Why Accessible Interviews?

My first interview experience: mock interview  
in a high school career preparedness class

Feedback I received:

- Your facial expression didn't seem friendly or happy enough
- Your handshake was "weak"
- Your tone of voice wasn't excited enough



Sixteen year old me!




# It Wasn't Just Me: Some Statistics

An autistic candidate who is **more highly educated** than an allistic competitor will statistically **not be offered the job** (Bruyère, 2024).

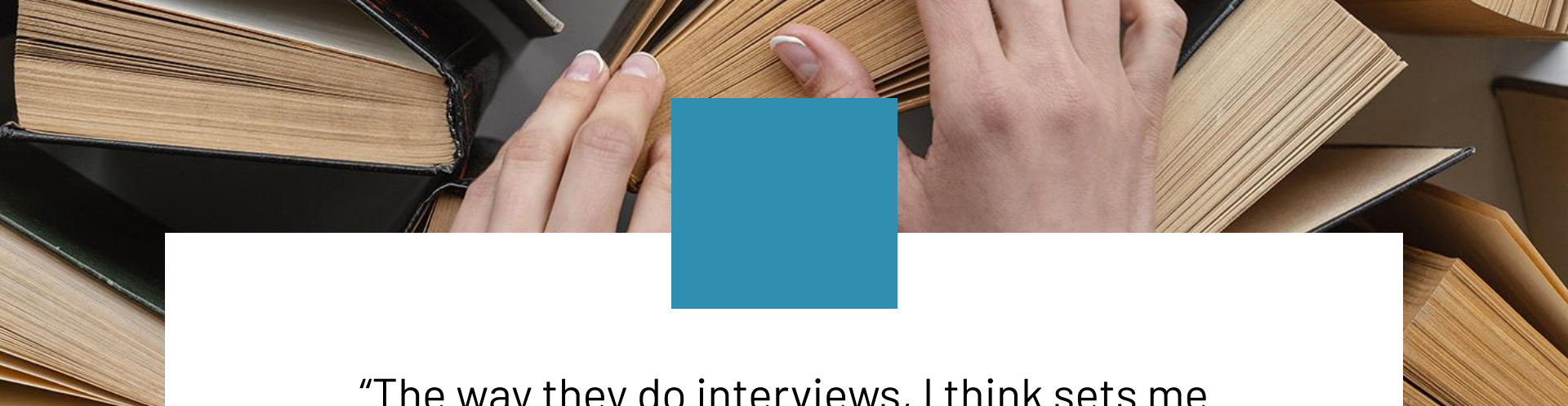
Autistic people experience **greater rates of under- and unemployment** than people with **any other type of disability** (Taylor & Seltzer, 2011; Hendricks, 2010).

Equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives in library workplaces often **do not include neurodivergence**, even though autistic librarians report **feeling uncomfortable and unsafe in their workplace** (Giles-Smith & Popowich, 2023).



“The huge part of my task in a job interview is to shut down anything that might reveal that I am autistic.”

—**Autistic study participant**  
**(Finn et al., 2023)**



“The way they do interviews, I think sets me  
up for failure.”

—**Autistic study participant**  
**(Finn et al., 2023)**

**We'll explore these  
five steps towards more  
accessible interviews:**

- 1. Assess current practices**
- 2. Alter the interview format**
- 3. Alter interview questions**
- 4. Provide accommodations**
- 5. Evaluate success**

# **Recommendations for Employers**

Use this five-step approach to addressing accessibility barriers in your interview process.

# Assess Current Interview Practices

How does your workplace currently conduct interviews?

What assumptions, practices, and biases may be present?

Some of these biases may include...

- The candidate's body language and tone of voice
- The candidate's ability to hold eye contact
- The candidate providing "blunt" or "overly-honest" answers

In order for an accessibility initiative to be successful, everyone in the organization must demonstrate commitment to the initiative (Hurley-Hanson, 2019).

# Alter the Interview Format

Use alternative methods for candidates to demonstrate skills (Vogus, et al., 2022)

- Complete an activity or exercise during the interview
- Perform a live demonstration of a skill
- Pre-prepare a portfolio, presentation, or project
- Provide written answers to questions

Avoid large panels of interviewers (Bruyère, et al., 2021)

Communicate information about the interview format ahead of time (Booth, 2016)

# Provide Interview Questions in Advance

Autistic candidates will provide responses that more accurately represent them and their skillset (Finn et al., 2023; Bruyère, et al., 2021; Hurley-Hanson, 2020)

Questions in advance also benefits employers (Rinderknecht, 2021)

Candidates better understand what you're looking for and provide more thoughtful and relevant answers

Reduced candidate stress provides you with a more accurate picture of who they are

Candidates are more likely to view your organization as a positive place to work

You can more easily identify candidates who clearly did not prepare for the interview

# Alter Interview Questions

Avoid questions that are vague, hypothetical, or purposefully bizarre. (Vogus, 2022)  
(Hurley-Hanson, et al, 2020)

- Instead of asking “Imagine if this happened,” ask “tell me about a time in your life when this happened.”
- Do not ask questions designed to assess personality or how a candidate responds to unexpected or bizarre questions.
  - (For example, “How many elephants are in New York City?” or “If you were an animal, which would you be?”).
- Stick to questions that are clearly relevant to skills used on the job



## Unadapted questions

## Adapted questions

What are some of your strengths?

I'm going to ask about your strengths:

- What do you consider to be your main strengths (things that you are good at?)
- How have you used these strengths at work [in education]?

What experience do you have of managing high workloads?

Think of an example of when you've had lots of tasks to complete in a limited amount of time. Please tell me:

- What was the situation?
- What management strategies did you use?
- Were these strategies effective?

Tell me about a time you've disagreed with a colleague — how did/would you handle it?

Think of a time you've disagreed with a colleague. Please tell me:

- What was the disagreement about?
- What did you do to resolve it?

**Examples of adapted questions found to be effective in a study of autistic job candidates (Maras, et al., 2021)**

# Proactively Offer Accommodations

Consider these ways to improve your existing accommodation process

- Remove medical documentation requirements
- Communicate to all candidates that accommodations are available
- Create a clear and documented process for requesting accommodation
- Ensure team members are educated about the accommodation process

Proactiveness is key. Your organization should anticipate accommodation needs and be prepared to meet them.

# Evaluate Success

After implementing changes at your organization, consider if they have had the desired effect. Reflection and iteration can help ensure success.

- Have you hired any openly neurodivergent people?
- Have candidates disclosed neurodivergence to you and/or accessed accommodations?
- Did neurodivergent candidates display job skills effectively to you?
- Have you conducted surveys or collected data about candidates' experiences of the interview process?
- What areas of bias and room for growth have you observed in your organization throughout the process?
- What have you learned about how to best assess a candidate's skills during interviews?

# Autistic People: Self-Advocacy Tips

- Ask for questions in advance if they are not provided
  - Cite this toolkit to support your request!
- Disclosure is your own decision
  - If you decide not to disclose autism, you may say “I have a disability” to be more vague
- Research the employer’s accommodation and disability policies, as well as EDI statements and commitments
- Practice!
- Ask for feedback after rejections

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A close-up photograph of several old, leather-bound books stacked on top of each other, showing their spines and pages. The books are arranged in a slightly overlapping manner, creating a sense of depth and texture.

# Thanks!

Are there any questions?

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