



# A Day in the Life Series.

## Searching for Employment as an Autistic Person

Finding employment can be difficult and stressful for just about anybody. As an autistic person, there are a number of additional hurdles to overcome. In particular, the interview process can be really difficult for autistic people, who often struggle with social interactions. But it isn't all bad news. Some autistic job seekers are really good at organising the search and working out what sort of jobs they want to apply for.

It's important that autistic people and the wider autistic community provides support to all autistic job searchers, including sharing ideas and strategies for finding work. It's also important to remember that not all autistic people can work, and not all want to find paid employment.

Volunteering, caring for family, working on creative endeavours, or looking after yourself are all just as important. Even with that in mind, finding employment is still a huge issue for autistic people: the Office for National Statistics reports that only one in five autistic people are employed.

This is just a very brief overview of the process. Enough could be written about looking for a job to fill a book! This guide is supposed to offer a quick summary to get you thinking about the process from an autistic perspective. Hopefully you find it useful.



## Searching

Finding a job you want to apply for and that you think you might have the experience and training to get can be extremely difficult. There are lots of places to find jobs, including online, in newspapers and magazines, in shop windows in your local area, or by networking with people nearby or the internet. Broadly speaking, autistic people will have smaller social networks than non-autistic people, and can struggle with social interaction, so using networking to find work can be tricky. Many, many jobs are now listed online, and that can be a great place to look. It's often possible to search for remote only jobs, or part time jobs, and this can be particularly helpful for autistic people. Job listings are often written in very specific language, filled with euphemisms and 'corporate speak', and this can make it difficult to understand what employers are looking for. For example, job listings might call for someone who is 'results-oriented' or a 'self-starter'. Searching for particular phrases online can help clear up some of the confusion. Some autistic people are really good at hyperfocusing. If you are one of those people and you can turn that hyperfocus towards searching for a job, you can be really effective, making shortlists of dozens of jobs across multiple sites, easily rejecting those that aren't suitable based on your criteria, and finding a handful of really great jobs you can apply for.

Nearly every part of the process is tiring and repetitive. It requires enormous energy. The best thing you can do is keep trying, which might not seem a very insightful thing to say, but it is true. Lots of new jobs are added every day to the larger job sites, so keep looking. Get into a rhythm, if you can. And it's ok if you're struggling to find something you want to apply for, or something you're qualified to do. Just be kind to yourself, give yourself time to take a break, and don't give up!





## Applications

Applications can be minefields of confusing questions and oddly specific detail. Lots of autistic people will find the straightforward questions ok, but writing about yourself in a personal statement can be a nightmare! The best advice is to find the job description itself, and go line by line, trying to write a sentence about yourself that directly addresses each line.

Manage your applications in whatever way makes sense for you. Keep a list and sort the jobs by deadline, or by how exciting or suitable the job is. Get your applications in early! Though this means you will have to wait longer to hear back, it definitely increases your chances, since some positions might close earlier than the listed deadline.

Disclosure is a huge issue that cannot be simply summarised in this article. In brief, it can be really difficult to know whether to include the fact that you are autistic in your application. On the positive side, many employers can offer support with your application or interview. For example, you can ask to see interview questions before the interview. Employers are obliged to offer reasonable adjustments, though this may not always happen in practice.

On the negative side, it's impossible to know if an individual employer will discriminate against you because you are autistic and reject your application out of hand. Think carefully about disclosure in each instance. Some employers describe themselves as 'disability confident', and you might find these are the best employers to send applications to.





## Waiting

Waiting can be the worst part. It might take weeks for employers to get back to you, or they might not get back to you at all! The advantage of getting into an application routine is best seen here, since you can fill the waiting by putting in more applications. Since there's only a slim chance of getting any job, it isn't advisable to only have one active application at any given time.

## Interviews

Interviews are almost always more difficult for autistic people than for non-autistic people. While an interview is a formal discussion, it definitely has a social element, and this can seem really unfair. In a better world, employers would find a less socially strenuous and anxiety-inducing way to test suitability for employment.

The main pieces of advice an autistic person can be offered before an interview will be familiar to most autistic people anyway: speak clearly and confidently, make eye contact, and think carefully about what you are being asked before answering. With the recent increase in online interviews, at least one of those pieces of advice is now slightly outdated, since you can't really make eye contact through a webcam!

The hours after an interview is a critical time. You will likely feel exhausted and stressed afterwards, so plan some things you can do to recharge. The frog energy system is really useful here, since it can identify how low your energy has gone and help you better know the ways to charge it back up. If you have multiple interviews, you might find it helpful to space them apart, with rest days in between, if possible.





## Success or Rejection

If you're successful, well done! Take time to celebrate an enormous achievement. It really is something to feel proud of.

Rejection is a horrible feeling, but it is almost inevitable when searching for a job. Very few people get the first job they apply for.

First and foremost, try not to take it personally. This is easier said than done, but remember that employers do not know you personally, and might have looked at hundreds of applications, perhaps only for a few minutes each. Employers are not rejecting you, as such. They are rejecting your application, and you are much more than a few paragraphs and a handful of answers on a bit of paper.

Look after yourself as best you can. Do the things that you know help you feel better. Take time to recharge. Ask for support from friends or family. Relax. Finding a job is a long process, and today's rejection might soon be replaced by tomorrow's success.

You may also find it helpful to turn those negative feelings into something productive by completing another application, particular since you may be feeling a bit hopeless. Starting the process again quickly can be useful. Either way, be kind to yourself. Remember that it's difficult, and that it's ok if you're struggling. Understand that the odds may seem stacked against you, but that it is possible to succeed. And good luck!