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# Preparing for the Workforce as a Neurodivergent Student

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The Future Skills Centre (FSC) is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to driving innovation in skills development so that everyone in Canada can be prepared for the future of work. We partner with policymakers, researchers, practitioners, employers and labour, and post-secondary institutions to solve pressing labour market challenges and ensure that everyone can benefit from relevant lifelong learning opportunities. We are founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint, and The Conference Board of Canada, and are funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program.

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# Finding success beyond the classroom

As a neurodivergent student, you bring unique strengths, perspectives, and skills to your studies and future career. But you may also face extra challenges when preparing for work-integrated learning, co-ops, internships, or your first job after graduation.

Understanding your skill strengths and employment options and identifying the right supports can help you succeed and feel confident in your transition to the workforce.

# Common challenges reported by neurodivergent students

- **Disclosure and stigma:** You might be considering whether to share your diagnosis or identity with your employer. If you feel this a challenging decision, you are not alone. While disclosure can offer benefits such as support, understanding, and accommodations, many still hesitate because they fear discrimination, are unsure of the process, or lack the required documentation.
- **Executive functioning:** Managing deadlines, staying organized, sustaining motivation, and balancing tasks can be tough, especially during job placements.
- **Understanding workplace expectations:** Adjusting to new environments can take time. Learning how to interpret new workplace expectations, communicate your strengths and support needs, and navigate unfamiliar processes can be daunting.
- **Career anxiety:** It's common to feel uncertain about your skills, fit, and employability. Many neurodivergent students report experiencing one or more mental health challenges.



# What helps

- **Use campus supports together:** Combine help from accessibility services, mental health supports, and career advisors. Accessing supports across these service areas can help you identify areas that you would benefit from support in and help you work toward your academic and career goals.
- **Connect with your career centre and alumni network:** Participate in career centre programs, workshops, and advising to build skills and explore opportunities. Engage with alumni through events or networking platforms for insights, advice, and potential job leads. These connections can expand your network and guide your next steps.
- **Find your community:** Join neurodivergent student groups, peer mentorship programs, or alumni networks to share experiences, get advice, and build confidence with others who understand the experience of being neurodivergent in the workforce.
- **Get workplace-ready:** Ask your career office about mock interviews, training modules, or job coaching to prepare for the workplace. Join job shadows, mentorship programs, panels, networking events, or career fairs to connect with professionals and gain insight. Each workplace is unique—focus on both exploration and readiness to find environments that fit your strengths and needs.
- **Continue to explore all your career options:** Look beyond traditional jobs. Self-employment, freelancing, or remote work may be a good fit. Ask a career advisor about start-up accelerators and incubators, or mentors who can help you explore these paths.
- **Practice workplace conversations:** Meet with a career advisor to rehearse how and when to discuss your work preferences in professional settings. These conversations may happen not only with your supervisor but also with colleagues or other stakeholders—each will look different. Practicing these discussions can help you communicate confidently and effectively in any workplace context. For example, you might say, “I do best with written instructions and clear deadlines.”
- **Explore executive-function supports for workplace use:** Identify productivity tools, coaching, or planning templates that help you stay organized and manage time effectively. When starting a new job, ask which tools and apps are provided or approved—most organizations require employees to use vetted platforms to protect data and privacy.



## Quick tips for success

- **Develop career-management skills early:** Rather than viewing career planning as a one-time choice, focus on building adaptable skills—like setting goals, seeking feedback, and navigating change—that support your growth throughout your career.
- **Seek out real-world learning opportunities:** There are many ways to build practical skills and explore career interests. Gain experience through work-integrated learning, volunteering, part-time roles, or summer jobs.
- **Advocate for yourself:** Let career advisors, placement coordinators, and employers know what helps you thrive, whether you choose to disclose your neurodiversity status or not.
- **Find ways to build community:** Neurodivergent peers, mentors, advisors, and networks all matter.

## Further reading

This resource is informed by our previous research that examined the experiences of neurodivergent Canadians in education and employment, and explored the advancement of neuroinclusive policies for learning and work.

- *Making the Invisible Visible: Neurodivergent Students' Experiences in Canadian Higher Education*. The Conference Board of Canada, 2024.
- *Creating Inclusive Campuses: Neuroinclusive Policies and Practices in Post-Secondary Education*. The Conference Board of Canada, 2025.

See also:

- *Thinking Differently at Work: Guide for Neurodivergent Employees*. Association of Canadian Financial Officers (ACFO-ACAF), 2025.

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## **Preparing for the Workforce as a Neurodivergent Student**

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