

How to disclose

Disclosing to employers - Information series

This information should, in particular, be read alongside our ['When to disclose'](#) information.

It's a good idea to be ready to self-disclose your criminal record if:

1. You have unspent convictions and you're asked, by the employer, about your criminal record
2. You are applying for a role that is not covered by the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act, and your criminal record is not yet 'filtered'.

Preparing to disclose – General points

1. Be honest – answer questions directly and honestly. Make sure you disclose all that you need to.
2. Don't be embarrassed – almost one in four people of working age have at least one conviction, and many more have police cautions. Employers are likely to have experienced criminal record disclosures before.
3. Personalise your disclosure - The most effective disclosure is one which genuinely and accurately reflects your circumstances and attitudes.
4. Try to address any concerns – The employer may have concerns, or think they are taking a risk. You need to explain yourself and reassure the employer. Try to make it clear that just because you made a mistake in the past, it doesn't mean that you'll make another one.
5. Be positive – Try not to focus entirely on the negative results of your conviction. Talk about what you've learnt and you have become a better person as a result.
6. Be the best – Don't just focus on your criminal record. Show that you have the right skills and experience for the role.
7. Provide supporting information - If you're able to, back up things that you say with proof. For example, you can often get proof that you've completed your community service, a letter from your probation officer, and sometimes get copies of pre-sentence reports and sentencing remarks of the judge. However, we normally advise against providing a copy of your formal criminal records - if the employer needs one, they will usually apply for it (with your consent) after they've offered you the job.
8. Leave a written record – however you choose you disclose, you should provide the employer with a written record (in your own words) of what you've disclosed.

Explaining your convictions

The most important thing when self-disclosing, whether in person or in writing, is to make sure that you relate to the job that you're applying for. You need to try and put yourself in their shoes – they'll be making a judgement based on the information you provide. So, consider:

1. When the offences were committed – if the offences happened a long time ago (even if the convictions were quite recent) then highlight this
2. Number of offences – if the offence was a one-off and out of character, this is important to point out. If you committed a number of offences over a period of time, try to group them. For example; "between 2004 and 2007, I was convicted four times for theft-related offences".
3. Relevance – if the offences are not particularly relevant, explain this. Offence categories can include a wide range of behaviour which can make it difficult for employers to judge whether the offence is relevant to the job. For example, "theft" could be stealing a 50p chocolate bar, or £20,000 from a bank. Tackle any issues with your record which you think might be relevant to the role. For example, if your offence was violence-related and you're applying to work with children, talk about any recent experience you have.
4. Seriousness – some offences sound more serious than the circumstances were. This is usually shown in the sentence that was received, so if this is the case, highlight it.
5. Context – if there were specific circumstances which led to your offending, explain that these are no longer present. For example, you may have been homeless at the time that you stole from a supermarket. This kind of information can help the employer better understand. Be careful not to let these reasons come across as excuses – employers generally look for people who are taking responsibility.
6. Responsibility – if you took responsibility for the offence – for example, by admitting it to the police when they arrested you – then you should say this to the employer.
7. Changed circumstances – Whatever the reasons that led to your offences, you should explain how you've addressed these, to reassure the employer that you won't be repeating it again in the future.
8. References – you should offer the names and contact details of people who can give the employer a good character references and who can vouch for you and your suitability.

In person or in writing?

There is no simple answer to this. Often, how you disclose will come from how the employer asks. If possible, tell the employer in the way that you feel most comfortable with. This will often depend on how you feel about talking and/or writing about your criminal record. It will also depend on the nature of your convictions, and the type of job you're applying for. Sometimes, the employers' policy will lean you towards a certain way. Ultimately, though, it's up to you. There is more information about 'when' to disclose in a separate document.

However, if you decide to disclose in person, we suggest that you still have something in writing. Alongside some notes for yourself (on what to say), you might want to have a simple summary of factual information, that you can offer to leave with the employer. Likewise, if you decide to disclose in writing, you should offer to have a face-to-face discussion, if the employer would find that useful.

Either way, we recommend that you provide the employer *at some point* during the recruitment process with the brief factual details of your criminal record in writing, so that you have evidence of what you've disclosed - keep a copy of this for your own records too.

Disclosing on an application form

It depends on how the employer asks – some will just have a 'tick-box', whereas others might have space to explain. The question will also vary. Generally, we advise against disclosing specific details on application forms. Instead, you could either:

1. State on the application form that you're sending a self-disclosure statement (see below).
2. Write on the application form "Yes - happy to discuss if selected for interview". Withholding details until interview might give you the chance to explain things face to face.
3. Wait until the interview – see our '[when to disclose](#)' for more information.

Disclosing through a self-disclosure statement

You might put together a self-disclosure to send with your application if they asked a question about convictions. However, it can be hard to communicate feelings and emotions in writing. Alongside the general points about disclosure (above), generally:

1. It should be no more than one side of A4.
2. In the same way as when you're writing your CV or a cover letter, this statement needs to be tailored to the specific vacancy. Your criminal record may be more relevant to some jobs than it is to others.
3. Don't copy 'template' self-disclosures. Generally, you need to cover the points above. But the best and most effective disclosures are those that are written by you personally and are genuine.
4. Try to write it in a way that people with no experience of the criminal records can understand.
5. In terms of structure, this will depend on what you think works best, but generally;
 - a. Start with something positive, like why you're applying for the job and what you can offer
 - b. Next, explain your convictions (see above)
 - c. Finally, finish with a strong and positive closing statement.
6. Get somebody you trust to check this over for you.
7. Make sure you send it to the appropriate person – if you're not sure, ask. Send it in a sealed envelope marked 'confidential'.
8. Keep copies of anything that you provide to the employer.

Disclosing at interview

Many people feel most comfortable disclosing face-to-face. In our experience, this is what works best for both individuals to explain, and employers to understand. Whether this is at interview, or at a later stage, alongside the general points about disclosure (above), generally:

1. Be proactive – If you were asked at application, we'd suggest you mention at interview what you put on your application. This shows initiative, and helps to avoid problems later down the line. For example, you might say: "As you saw on my application form, I have a criminal record. If you have any questions for me, I would be happy to discuss them, as I'm keen to address any questions or concerns that you may have".
2. Keep it simple. Make sure you keep your explanation simple and focused - don't babble. Watch the interviewers' body language to judge the right level of detail. There's always a risk that you let the disclosure dominate the interview.
3. Relax - It's difficult to be relaxed in an interview. Try not to come across as being defensive.
4. Prepare - Preparing beforehand will help you to reduce the chances of being caught off-guard by a question about your criminal record, or gaps in your employment history for when you were in prison. Make sure you know the details of your criminal record inside out. Hesitation or vagueness may make you look dishonest. Have the facts written down so you can refer to them if needed.
5. Practice - Do a trial-run beforehand with someone you trust.
6. Leave a written record – (see above)

Think like an employer - Prepare for questions

However you choose to disclose, you should be ready for extra questions that the employer might have. The questions below are ones that employers often ask (others can be found in the guidance we provide to employers), so you might want to think about how you'd answer them;

1. Can you tell me about your criminal record?
2. Why did you commit the offences?
3. Was there anything happening in your life at the time?
4. How can I be sure you're not a risk?
5. What steps have you taken to change your ways?
6. How is your life different now?

For more information about how to disclose, search for '[disclosing to employers](https://hub.unlock.org.uk/disclosing-to-employers)' on hub.unlock.org.uk. In particular, there are [some useful videos on our site about disclosing to employers](#).