



Prepare & take action

This worksheet is designed for you to organize your thoughts and actions for effective self-advocacy in various life settings. Based upon your situation, some steps may be irrelevant and others may need to be revisited. Review the entire worksheet before you begin. Consider and respond only to what is relevant to your circumstances.

Organize

- 1. Describe your issue or concern and your preferred solution to resolve it.

Cause: Describe the cause of your unique situation.

I am experiencing severe fatigue that is impacting my ability to do my job.

Effect: Summarize what you aim to change. Describe your key intent.

I would like to learn ways to accommodate my MS symptoms at work and determine the best way to request them so I can continue working.

Issue: Create a summary statement.

It is important for me to continue working. In order to do so, I need to ask for accommodations on the job. I will need to do research to determine how best to approach my employer and to request a reasonable accommodation.

Because: of certain MS symptoms, I am having difficulty working.

I need or I want: accommodations in order to continue working successfully.

Practice saying it.

- 2. List the pros and cons of taking steps toward self-advocacy. This includes identifying positive and negative aspects of your current situation, along with the potential risks and rewards associated with self-advocacy. Identify what you believe must be addressed to meet your unique needs or special concerns. Circle the aspects most important to you.

Table with 2 columns: Pros, Cons. Pros: Working brings in a paycheck and provides benefits to me and my family. Cons: Working makes my fatigue even worse.

Working gives me a sense of purpose.	I will need to disclose my condition.
Accommodations will help me to be more productive and ultimately help the bottom line of my company.	I am scared I will be fired by asking for what I need.
Hopefully, with accommodations, it will allow me greater job security, as I know I will be able to keep up with the work I have to perform.	I may bring attention to myself by asking for accommodations and be seen as getting preferential treatment.

3. Research. Identify questions relevant to your situation or circumstances. Cite references, resources or trusted advisers for answers to these.

Question	Reference, Resource or Contact Information	Outcome
Do I have the right to ask for accommodations?	National MS Society ADA, Win-Win Approach brochures, employment publications Job Accommodation Network (JAN) DBTAC (ADA&IT Technical Assistance Center)	My employer does abide by the ADA and that law offers me the option of requesting reasonable accommodations.
What accommodations could help to manage fatigue?	Job Accommodation Network (JAN) National MS Society	Flexible work arrangements and/or hours could prove useful.
What is the best way to ask for accommodations?	Job Accommodation Network (JAN) National MS Society	Can ask in person and/or in writing. If in writing, use sample accommodation request letter from JAN.
What do I do if request denied?	Job Accommodation Network (JAN) U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) National MS Society Local office of human relations/human rights	Denial may be in violation of ADA — can contact EEOC to file claim or call National MS Society to get referral to attorney and local resources.

4. Summarize key research findings and communications. What did you learn about your rights? What about your responsibilities?

My Rights	My Responsibilities
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ADA allows me right to ask for reasonable accommodations.	Responsibility for coming up with accommodations is mine.
To control how much information is disclosed to my employer and that info is to be kept confidential.	Determine the best time to ask for accommodations and how best to present them — in person, in writing, both.
To stay active in the workplace and be a productive member of society.	Determine correct person to request accommodations from.
To file claim if accommodations completely denied for no apparent reason.	Have back-up ideas in mind if initial accommodations not feasible.

- Identify who has authority regarding your situation. Begin by determining the front line for customer service, but also be alert for names and contact information of those at higher levels. Put a star next to the name of your first point of contact.

I will make this request of my immediate supervisor and be open to involvement with the human resources department. I can also refer them to JAN to discuss accommodation alternatives. Ultimately, if need be, I can contact the EEOC and an employment attorney.

- Brainstorm possible solutions to address your concern.

I will need to request a reasonable accommodation in order to manage my extreme fatigue on the job. I anticipate asking for some flexibility in the work environment and schedule, especially telecommuting.

- Review your rights and responsibilities (*see #4 above*). Revisit question 6. Put a star next to your preferred solution(s), given your rights and responsibilities.
- Anticipate objections or resistance to your preferred solution(s). Summarize your responses to the likely arguments made in response to your request. Refer to information you can use to support your argument.

Objection	Response	Reference or Resource <i>in support of your response</i>
Will not allow for telecommuting.	Propose altering work schedule or allowing for naps.	National MS Society publications, JAN, EEOC publications
Will not make any accommodations at all.	Will file claim of discrimination.	EEOC, county government Office of Human Relations

9. Establish a fall-back position or bottom line if your preferred solution is not adopted. What are you are willing to settle for?

If I am not allowed to work from home a few days per week, I hope to be able to adjust my schedule and/or combine breaks so I can take a brief nap if necessary to manage my fatigue. I would be willing to work from home only one day per week or do it on a trial basis and evaluate how it is working for me and for my employer.

What options do you have if your bottom line is not met? Is there a formal review or appeal process? Conduct initial research and determine next steps for an appeal process.

If my employer is not willing to accommodate me, I can contact the US EEOC to file formal charges of discrimination. I can also contact my local Human Relations Commission. I can do more research into my options under the ADA by calling JAN and my local DBTAC.

10. Revisit the positive aspects of your situation (*see #2 above*). Recall these during the course of your self-advocacy journey.

I have worked for my company for over five years and have had positive evaluations. I have a good relationship with my direct supervisor and honestly feel that I am an asset to my company. They are lucky to have me as I have expertise that is valuable to my employer.

Prepare – Determine your method & timing

Prepare

Determine your method and timing. In general, more personal and less formal communication will be perceived as less threatening. Consider the benefits and drawbacks of initially discussing your situation in person, via phone, or in writing. Identify your preferred option.

If you intend to call or visit in person, remember to consider the most convenient time for your point of contact.

Practice

Draft a letter about your issue and the outcome you hope to see. Revisit it a day or two later. Make any necessary revisions. Be concise, clear and cordial. Rephrase any aggressive or disrespectful statements. Include complimentary or positive remarks. Show your revised letter to someone whose judgment you respect. Ask for their feedback.

Role play. Practice how you will state your points. Ask a friend to role play with you. Take a turn advocating your point of view. Switch roles. Listen to your partner advocate your point of view. Pretend you are on the phone, too. Discuss what you observed during the exercise.

Rehearse on your own. Deliver your main points in front of a mirror. Listen to your voice: maintain an easy pace and moderate volume. Watch your facial expressions; try to remain relaxed and open.

Take Action

- Review your work above.

- Schedule an appointment by placing a call or writing a letter to the front line of customer service who can address your circumstances.

- Take detailed notes during your discussion, including names, dates and contact information. Save them along with notes from future conversations, and file them in chronological order. Include any correspondence related to your issue, with the results of any research or other documentation.

- Establish next steps and mutual accountability. Agree upon a timeframe for next steps or issue resolution.

- Follow up. Provide any promised information or resources within the agreed upon timeframe. Renegotiate if you will be delayed, or if your point of contact fails

to respond. Offer to provide additional information or resources to resolve any questions. Restate your issue and the outcome you hope to see. Commit to a timeframe for issue resolution.

Write a thank you note if you achieve your desired outcome. This is not only polite, but documents your agreement.

Remember, you may need to follow up to ensure your desired outcome.

If you receive no response or an unsatisfactory response, consider how much additional effort you are prepared to invest. Often, an appeal to a higher level is possible. Research the options relevant to your particular situation. Consider what is at stake to determine whether or not to proceed.

If the situation involves family, broadening the discussion to include a trusted counselor or clergy member may be useful.