

Self-Locating and Self-Identifying

Many employers request that Indigenous students self-identify in their job application. Self-identification can take the form of adding a note in your cover letter, including a diversity statement, or completing a questionnaire. This information sheet helps students navigate their process of self-locating and their decision to self-identify in the hiring process.

Employment Equity & Legal Protections

The **Canadian Human Rights Act** (R.S.C. 1985, c. H-6) protects against hiring and workplace discrimination, while the **Employment Equity Act** (S.C. 1995, c.44, s.2) encourages employers to recognize, and proactively address, the employment barriers faced by women, Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, and visible minorities.

To help employers identify and correct inequitable employment opportunities, the **BC Office of the Human Rights Commissioner** allows employers to introduce limited and preferential hiring programs in favour of equity-seeking groups.

Responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) Calls to Action on employment disparity, employers may ask you to self-identify as Indigenous so as to:

- Track recruitment, application, & hiring gaps;
- Exercise preferential or limited hiring procedures;
- Create equitable and diverse workplaces; and
- Better meet the needs of Indigenous partners & clients.

"Employment equity means more than treating persons in the same way but also **requires special measures and the accommodation of differences."**

- EEA 1995, c.44, s.2

Self-locating & Self-identifying

Self-location is a deeply personal process. For many, self-locating is a way of acknowledging and honouring relationships with relatives, lands, and communities. By reflecting on these relationships, self-location can also be helpful in identifying your social positions.

Self-identification is a voluntary process. For some job applications, you might self-identify in your cover letter in a way that feels right to you. Alternatively, employers might provide you with a short questionnaire that asks about your status, membership, and/or ancestry.

There are many ways in which one may self-locate and identify. Our intention is not to provide a template to follow. We instead pose a series of questions that may help you through the reflective process of self-location. Consider reflecting on the following questions with a friend, relative, community mentor, Elder, school counselor, or other person you trust to respect your process.

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Questions to Ask Yourself

- What is your name? What are your family names? What stories do these names carry?
- Who are your relatives? Where are your ancestors from?
- With which Nations, bands, clans, or groups do you find belonging?
- What do your relationships with your communities look like?
- What traditions, activities, experiences, and knowledges (re)connect you with your community and culture?
- On whose lands were you born? Where did you grow up?
- What is your relationship to the territory on which you currently reside?
- Looking at yourself as a whole person, how does your Indigenous identity and experience relate with your gender, sexual orientation, age, class, ability, and additional aspects of your cultural, ethnic, or racial identities?

Experiences of dislocation and reconnection are Indigenous experiences, and it is okay to not have answers to these questions. It is also normal for your experiences, insights, and relations to grow over time and change how you answer some of these questions. Further, we encourage you to connect with members of your communities to engage with specific cultural protocols.

Questions that are Illegal for Employers to Ask

Under human rights laws, employers may not ask you about: your age, family circumstances, health, history of arrest, faith, disability, gender, or ethnicity (unless relevant to the job). If your interviewer asks questions that are illegal to ask, regardless of intent, curiosity, or tone, you can decline to answer.

Your stories, experiences, and identities are yours to tell and disclose—or not. In applying and interviewing for jobs, consider reflecting on your personal boundaries. What are you comfortable sharing with employers?

Setting Boundaries

Here, we identify some strategies to assert your boundaries and challenge prying and/or irrelevant questions that you might encounter in your job search.

Trusting Your Own Judgement & Engaging the Interviewer

Use your own judgement in deciding what is best for you and your situation. The interview is a place for you to assess the employer's values and compare them to your own. Sometimes, you might want to draw on personal and relevant life experiences to tell the interviewer why you are the best candidate for the job. We emphasise that disclosure should always be voluntary, and we encourage you to communicate your rights and boundaries if you should encounter inappropriate employer conduct. You might also consider following up with your WIL Coordinators or community Elders for support.

- Turn the question back on the interviewer. Ask for specification: 'how is (my) _____ relevant to the position?'
- Redirect the conversation towards hiring criteria and job performance. E.g., 'This does not affect my performance and competency as a [leader/team member/etc].'
- Move on to the next question: 'I'd prefer not to answer this question.'