

Discussing Your Conviction Record

Directions: The following steps will help you practice how to disclose your criminal background to a potential employer during an interview.

When talking about your background in an interview, use the PAAR method.

STEP 1: P = Put the employer at ease

STEP 2: A = Accept responsibility for your offense

STEP 3: A = Use action/accomplishment statements

STEP 4: R = Reassure the employer that you are a good person to work with

Practice writing your own PAAR statements in the boxes below. There is an example statement below each box to help you.

Put the employer at ease. When an employer asks about your criminal background during an interview, avoid going into too much depth about your conviction. Be honest and brief, but do not mention specific details of the offense. You could also soften the offense. For example, instead of plainly saying you were convicted of robbery, say something like, "I took something that was not mine to take." Avoid the term "felony." Write down how you will talk about your conviction.

Example: "I understand you will complete a background check and may have some questions about my record. Five years ago, I was involved in a physical altercation that resulted in a conviction. This was a long time ago and I am not that person anymore."

Accept responsibility for your offense. Do not blame others for your actions. Instead, say something such as, "In the past, I made a poor decision." In the space below, write a response for how you will accept responsibility when asked the question, "Have you ever been convicted of a crime? If so, please explain."

Example: "I am not proud of my actions, and I have no one to blame but myself."

Action/Accomplishment statements. Talk about what you've learned since your conviction. Convey regret for your actions and discuss what you have learned from your experience to show that you will not repeat your actions. For example, use phrases like, "I'm not proud of my actions, and..." or "At the time my priorities were not right; however, since then ..." Write down what you have learned since your conviction.

Then, explain what constructive changes you have made in your life since your conviction. It could be something like completing an education program, doing volunteer work, or having more positive relationships. Now, write down all the positive changes you have made. Begin by stating, "Since then, I have ..."

Example: "Since that period in my life, I have learned a lot about the person I want to be and have made many changes in my life. While I was incarcerated, I earned my GED and worked in the kitchen where I gained culinary skills. I am thankful for this because it helped me discover my passion for working with food. I recently completed an Employment Readiness Training at Goodwill-Easter Seals and began volunteering at my church."

Reassure the employer that you are a good person to work with. Clarify your goals for the future, how you are moving forward, and what you are doing to accomplish them. Explain how a position at the company you are interviewing for will help you accomplish your goals. Convince the employer that you would be an asset to the company if hired. Write down how you will encourage the employer to hire you.

Example: I want to assure you that I am hard-working and dedicated, and I have the skills needed for this position. If given the chance, I would be a great asset to your company.

Put it altogether. Combine your responses to steps 1-4 to form a complete response to the question, "Have you been convicted of a crime? If so, please explain."
Practice saying the completed response out loud.