

GROUP EXERCISES & PRESENTATIONS

What are Group Exercises and Presentations for?

A group exercise is a way for a company to assess how you work in a team by observing how well you interact with others. This will often be based around a specific case study and you will usually be asked to work in a small group of 4-6 people. In general, you will be seated around a table with assessors observing you. You will normally be given individual reading time and then a set amount of time for group discussion.

The competencies employers will be looking at will vary according to the company/role. However there are some which you should always keep in mind.

- Analytical thinking; *how you use the information to solve problems*
- Team working; *how you work with the other people in your group*
- Influence; *how much you persuade people*
- Achieving business objectives; *how clearly you keep the organisation's goals in mind*
- Communication; *how effectively you communicate*
- Listening; *how well you listen to what others are saying*

Some companies will give you the topic in advance, others will allocate preparation time (with the rest of the group) for you on the day itself. Similarly, with presentations, some companies will allow you the brief in advance, while others will expect you to work under pressure and produce a presentation on the day.

Group Exercises – how to approach them

Working as a team with the people you are up against for the same job can sometimes be quite daunting – but don't worry, there are some things you can do to ensure that you come across well on the day.

- Try and join in early. This introduces yourself to the group and makes everybody aware that you have opinions and that you are going to express them. Being quiet at the beginning can make it difficult to contribute later on in the discussion. However, please bear in mind that there is always one person who panics, dives straight in and lays all their cards on the table at the beginning – which can come across as bossy and domineering. Don't panic, and don't be that person!
- Assess your priorities. Work out which battles you want to win and which ones you are happy to compromise on.
- Don't forget the scenario has been thought up by the employer for a reason. There is likely to be conflicting briefs. If conflict does arise, a good tip is to act as the chairman, find a compromise between two conflicting groups to reach a solution and move the group forward.

- Be prepared to be out-argued by a strong candidate or a stronger brief. A key competency is the ability to listen and change your mind where appropriate.
- Try not to be domineering or talk all the time. But when you do make a point, be sure to make them clearly and concisely – as well as powerfully.
- Other information may come to light during the group exercise. You will have to be flexible and react if this does happen and be prepared that this may force a reassessment of your priorities.

Tips for Presentations

Presenting can be one of the most nerve wracking experiences for candidates – especially if you have never done it before. Remember, if done well and with confidence, this part of the assessment will do more to present you and your skills than any other – and if you are given the brief in advance, you have a large amount of control over how it goes. Practice is the key to success!

Below are some more useful tips on how to approach a presentation at an assessment centre.

- Remember that the audience is the sole focus of your presentation, so try to connect with them from the beginning. Look at them, not at the floor or ceiling.
- Remember that you are your own visual aid (and the first one the audience sees) so dress and behave appropriately.
- Hands clasped too tightly in front of you can make you look nervous – try clasping them behind your back to give an appearance (and feeling) of confidence.
- Try to move around a bit rather than getting glued to one spot. It is fine to move your arms as you speak but don't fiddle and fidget constantly as it will distract the audience.
- Make sure that you don't stand in front of the slides, or turn your back on the audience whilst you are speaking, as you risk distracting them from what you are saying.
- Use your notes to expand on the slides' contents, rather than simply reading through what you have written – the audience can read the slides for themselves.
- If the size of the audience permits, you should maintain eye contact individually, but if it is large then you should look at groups of people instead. Remember, don't stare as this can make your audience feel uncomfortable!
- Try not to mumble or apologise – you will not ensure that you are coming across as confident and as knowledgeable as possible.
- Using humour as part of your presentation (if the subject matter allows) is fine - try to use anecdotes and examples where appropriate.
- Be positive! If you show energy and enthusiasm for the topic this will automatically translate into how you come across to the audience.