

## Group exercises

### What assessors want

Teamwork, problem-solving ability and a logical, analytical approach to the task. You will be working with others on a practical task or problem-solving activity, or could be involved in a debate or discussion.

### They don't want...

... dominating personalities who take over or shy retiring mice they can't assess.

### Top tips

- Understand the objective of the task and what result needs to be achieved.
- Make sure you contribute, but don't dominate proceedings.
- Be assertive in arguing your point, but be courteous and listen to others.
- Be prepared to compromise and brush up your diplomacy skills.
- Be the person who draws out the ideas of quieter members of the team.
- Be a good task manager: keep the team focused on the task and result that needs to be achieved, summarise progress and keep track of time.

Group interviews, where you're interviewed with other candidates, are popular for entry-level or hourly wage jobs, like retail, or those where employees often work as a team. It saves employers the time of interviewing candidates individually and allows them to see how they interact with others. Many group interviews involve a lot of activities, so don't expect to be sitting down answering questions the whole time.

Patrick Edmunds, a former hiring manager, told [Snag A Job](#) that candidates must be ready for anything in these types of interviews. Some may involve talking with a panel of interviewers, while others involve a project that the group must complete together. There's no way to prepare for this unless you're told beforehand, so just be on your toes. Be ready to be social, show your leadership skills, and to think differently about a problem than others might.

You should also be personable but assertive, Edmunds recommends. It's important to show that you can work with a team and get others to like you, but you have to speak up to make sure that you're noticed. Don't interrupt or try to put down other candidates, but make sure you're highlighting your best qualities for interviewers to see.

## **Group Interviews: What Candidates Need to Know**

Group interviews: employers love them. Candidates hate them. But with the right preparation and conduct, your genuine confidence will ensure that you (literally) stand out from the crowd. Read on.

Generally, group interviews (or group assessments) are similar in set up. Depending on the size of the applicant pool, candidates are broken down into groups and assigned various problem solvers to complete. Representatives from the organisation quietly circle the floor as they observe the group dynamics, and jot down their observations on each candidate.

As organisations increasingly recognise the value of teamwork and healthy interpersonal relationships amongst their employees, group interviews have become more common. These elements can be easily assessed, as can other attributes such as communication skills and lateral thinking. Another reason why group interviews are becoming more prevalent is simply more practical – they're a tremendous time saver.

And candidates? Well, they certainly don't share their potential employers' enthusiasm over the gruelling and potentially awkward concept. After all, candidates are spending hours face to face with their competitors – *and have to work well with eachother!* Additionally, most candidates don't know what the assessors are looking for, and therefore have no idea how to appropriately conduct themselves.

[Innovate CV TV](#) spoke to investment banker, Maurice Benisty. Having been both a participant and assessor of group interviews, he had some tremendous insights to offer:

### **Preparation**

There's no excuse for not [preparing for the interview](#), even though you may feel as if you're out of the direct spotlight.

“[Candidates need to] have a depth of understanding about the institutions [they're] applying for – what the organisation does...”

- Maurice Benisty

Often, the group tasks revolve around different aspects of the organisation and industry. The more background information you have, the better positioned you are.

“[Research] what the job requires and make sure there's a match.”

If you appreciate the traits and skills needed for the position, you have a huge advantage. You can pinpoint specific skills the assessors will be looking for during the group interview process. However, never brazenly refer to your background experiences during the teamwork process – no one cares, and you'll look like a fool.

Depending on the job, don't be surprised if you're asked to speak in front of the other candidates about any general topic (for example, "If I could go anywhere for a holiday..."). The assessors are looking for an insight into your personality. You'll also be tested on your communication skills and poise. If you **subtly** relate your succinct talk to the job, the assessors will take note. ("I'm definitely a people person, so I'd just love to spend as much time with the locals. And I'd love to learn the language – I love a challenge!")

## **Presentation**

"[It's important] the way you dress; the way you present yourself."

Some do's and don'ts:

- Don't 'power-dress' to intimidate or stand out.
- Personal hygiene is vital. Too many candidates don't wear enough deodorant, or put on too much cologne/perfume. Assessors can't help but notice, and subconsciously look at you unfavourably.
- Arrive 15 minutes early – you'll feel more comfortable with the environment, and hopefully get a chance to meet some of the assessors. All you need to do is engage them with friendly small talk. If they want to take the opportunity to ask you about yourself, great! But be prepared. If the assessors look busy, give them their space. Go up to some other candidates and start chatting! You'll demonstrate your initiative, and feel more at ease and confidence once the work begins.
- Shake hands with everyone you can, as long as you can do so naturally. No one likes the professional-networker, but people appreciate genuine friendliness.
- Make eye contact with people, and smile. The more you pretend you're having a good time, the more you'll actually enjoy yourself. Your good nature and interest in the activities will be picked up.

## **Conduct**

"Be polite....Not overpowering, [and] don't compete..."

During the group activities, you're being assessed on:

- Your leadership/teamwork skills – How well do you work in teams? What's your communication style? Do you take the initiative?

If you simply ‘go with the flow’ as a follower, you’re in danger of fading into the crowd. As such, you’re far better off leading *if you’re capable of doing so*. So, if you’re steering the ship:

- o Put forward ideas, and ask people what they think. **Listen.**
- o Delegate effectively as much as possible.
- o Give public recognition when there’s a good idea.
- o Engage people who are quiet; get them involved!
- o Courteously accept any feedback. Review and alter your strategy if need be.

However, **never** engage in a leadership struggle. Rather withdrawal gracefully and focus on contributing as best you can. Put it behind you, and get on with the job. Don’t sabotage your leader.

- Your decision making skills – Always have a solid rationale for your opinion or strategy. But be prepared to demonstrate flexibility if need be.
- Your creativity – The assessors have likely ran these activities many times before. They’ve probably seen the same solutions and strategies presented again and again. Try think of an original approach to the tasks at hand – as long as it makes sense. But don’t waste time – if you’re not getting any inspiration, get on with the job.
- Your ability to influence – Can you appropriately influence others to adopt your position?
- How you manage under stress – Group interviews are difficult and pressure-cookers. Don’t lose your cool. Even if it’s all going wrong, you’re better off taking it as an opportunity to demonstrate your composure and clear thinking than frantically trying to resolve the situation. The end may not justify the means.

Group interviews can be a tremendous opportunity to show off your true colours. With some preparation and good conduct, a well presented-candidate is well positioned to make a memorable and favourable impression. And you know, you may even find yourself having a good time! Good luck!

