Assessment Centres

Assessment Centres are an important part of the recruitment process as they allow employers to observe applicants tackling a variety of tasks in different settings within a time frame. Employers will be assessing your skillset, motivation, knowledge and interests. They are looking to see if you have done your research on the organisation and if you understand the role applied for.

What are employers looking for?

The core competencies are usually: leadership, interpersonal skills including communication, team work, problem solving, self-management, initiative, planning and organisation, persuading and influencing and commercial awareness.

Assessment methods

Psychometric Tests could be numerical and verbal reasoning, abstract and inductive reasoning, increasingly situational judgement tests and occasionally personality tests. Remember if you have a learning disability you may be entitled to extra time. The Maths Support Centre in the library can provide assistance especially if you haven’t worked at GCSE-level Maths for some time. The BBC Bitesize’s in Maths and English also enable you to brush up your skills. There are often examples on company websites and there are also practice tests with online feedback on our website (student/staff log-in required).

Presentations Make sure that your presentation is well-structured, relevant to the given topic and can be delivered within the time limit. Do not have an overload of PowerPoint slides with too many words. Practise giving the presentation and ask a friend to watch your presentation and give you constructive feedback. Never just read the slides. Make eye contact with everyone in the room, smile and be aware of excessive hand gestures.

Handouts It is straightforward to produce handouts if you are delivering a PowerPoint presentation but make sure they can be read. A tactic is to give out handouts at the start. This is considered good practice in university and work presentations but handouts should be used with caution at Assessment Centres. They can often divert attention away from a candidate’s ability to present and communicate clearly and may interfere with making eye-contact with the assessors. The employer will be assessing your ability to present not produce wonderful handouts.

Group presentations should be delivered in a smooth, logical sequence with no overlap or duplication. Remember that it is not a competitive exercise. Group presentations are designed to see how individuals work in teams and how they communicate effectively.

TargetJobs offers a straightforward presentations guide via their website and Businessballs is a useful site offering free advice on learning and development.

E-tray and In-Tray exercises are designed to test your ability to absorb and process complex information quickly and effectively. You will be given information, instructions and a deadline. Documents may include letters, memos, reports, phone messages, spreadsheets and emails. Candidates might be given background on the organisation. Your task will be to think which is the first priority and why? Think about the key skills this exercise is looking to demonstrate? You might be given a scenario designed to provide an understanding of the role and the important factors involved. Examples could be covering for a sick colleague, running an event or managing a project.

Try to remember to: read each item of information given, decide on its priority and the action needed, check the timings given for you to complete the task and stick to them, demonstrate how you can handle several tasks at once, prioritising appropriately, recognise that you won’t necessary complete all the tasks, deal with

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the essentials and recognise that some tasks can wait. On completion of the exercise you are likely to be asked by an assessor about your reasons for taking the approach you chose and to justify your actions. TargetJobs has some advice on in-tray exercises on their page: What are In-Train exercises?

Group discussions can be on topics that do not require research but some exercises may need technical understanding. Employers are looking at your interpersonal skills, so try not to dominate the group or be too quiet. Even if you can’t come up with great ideas, you can still demonstrate your team and communication skills by reminding people of the task, the time constraints and by drawing in quieter members.

Role plays usually involve an assessor acting as your client in a simulation and the aim of these is to test your negotiation skills. You may be given a briefing before the exercise starts, so use this time to think about other skills the role play is calling for. Just try to stay positive, think about how you might feel as the client and empathize. Clarify the problem and using your research on the job and organization, try to come to a logical conclusion.

Attending social events You need to listen to others – avoid getting over excited and talking over people or clamping up and not speaking. Ask questions and show you are interested. Talk to employees not just to fellow candidates. Relax – demonstrate your communication skills and interpersonal skills, be diplomatic! First impressions count and behaviour in this informal setting may inform any decisions about job offers.

Top tips for assessment centres

- Be imaginative by coming up with original insights and solutions
- Always be able to justify your actions rationally – you need to explain why you decided to take the approach you did and how you might do it differently in a different context
- Manage your time effectively, working within the time given for the task
- Stay calm and demonstrate how you work well under pressure
- Demonstrate listening skills, empathy and use body language when communicating to peers in group tasks or at one-to-one/group interviews
- Finally, seek feedback from the assessors on how you could improve performance

In your written responses to the tasks given (e.g. responding to emails or letters)

- Express yourself clearly and concisely
- Work out an outline of what you want to write, the points you need to make and in what order
- Keep it concise and use bullet points. Use clear, business writing appropriate to the recipient
- Draft your response, edit and proof-read it for errors
- Be sensitive to the way your written responses may be interpreted by using diplomatic language