

ASSESSMENT CENTRES

Experience and research has led employers to conclude that no single selection method can satisfactorily assess job seekers. As a result, many now combine a variety of assessment tools – for example, business case studies, psychometric tests, one-on-one and group interviews, panel interviews, role plays, and giving a presentation. Collectively, these make up what are known as assessment centres.

Design

Assessment centres differ greatly in design. They may, for example:

- be the final stage of the selection process, before job offers are sent
- run for only a couple of hours, a whole day, or (occasionally) longer
- occur in the employer's head office, at a hotel, or other venue assess you in groups of six to twelve or more
- involve some outdoor activity (non-physical, unless of course a key job requirement)
- have lots of silent, anonymous people apparently loitering around (these are the trained assessors – sometimes managers of the organisation, sometimes external consultants).

Preparation

- To succeed in any stage of the recruitment process, and particularly in the assessment centres, you need to research thoroughly the exact criteria you will be evaluated against – often referred to as the key competencies.
- Ask the employer if you can see exercises similar to the ones you will encounter. Ask your Careers Service for sample case interviews popular with consulting firms, role plays, or assistance in preparing presentations.
- Dress as you would for an interview with the organisation.

Relax and enjoy! As long as you've left no stone unturned with your preparation, simply aim to do your best and learn from the experience.

Handling Group Assessment

- Have the right attitude from the start – unless told otherwise, your task is not to 'win' against the other members of your group. There is, of course, an undercurrent of competition, but you are all being assessed against the same standards – it's possible that everyone in your group could be selected.
- You must demonstrate that you can work effectively with others. Putting another person's ideas down or overtalking them won't impress – and certainly doesn't constitute relationship-building or leadership skills if they are being assessed!
- Be actively engaged at all times, and be yourself – not who you think the assessors are looking for.
- Don't rush. Take a few moments to establish which criteria the employer is assessing and plan your strategy.
- Flexibility of thought, sensitivity towards others, a sense of humour, and appropriately asserting your viewpoint is usually preferable to confrontation and talking just to be heard.
- Don't be put off either by 'high fliers' or by people you assume have no chance of succeeding. Remember that everyone will do better in some exercises than others, so concentrate on demonstrating your own strengths – that's what the assessors are looking for.
- You may be asked in a subsequent interview how you went in the group exercises.

Afterwards

- Ensure you take some time to reflect on your own performance.
- Contact the employer within a few days and politely request as much feedback on your performance as they can give.