

HOW TO EXCEL IN GROUP DISCUSSION ?

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Abstract

In the present scenario, many recruiters conduct Group Discussion(GD) with or without written test, in order to assess the interactive skills of students and how good they are at communicating with other people. The GD is done to check how the potential candidates behave, participate and contribute in a group, how much importance do they give to the objective of the group as well as their own, how well each member listens to viewpoints of others and how open-minded is each member, in accepting views contrary to his own. The aspects which make up a GD are verbal communication, non-verbal behavior, conformation to norms, decision-making ability and cooperation.

There are many misconceptions about Group Discussion. In short, Group Discussion (GD) is a simulated exercise, where the student cannot suddenly put up a show, since the evaluators will see through that easily. A GD is a methodology used by an organization to gauge whether the candidate has certain personality traits and skills that it desires in its

employees. The traits assessed in a GD and guidelines for excelling GD are presented in this paper.

Traits assessed in Group Discussion

Some of the personality traits the GD is trying to evaluate include:

- Ability to work in a team,
- Communication skills,
- Reasoning ability,
- Leadership skills,
- Initiative,
- Assertiveness,
- Flexibility,
- Creativity

The Basics of How Most Group Discussions Work

Normally groups of 8-10 candidates are formed into a leaderless group and are given a specific situation to analyze and discuss within a given time limit. The group may be given a case study and asked to come out with a solution for a problem. The group may be given a topic and asked to discuss specific aspects of

the problem. A panel will observe the proceedings and evaluate the members of the group.

Let's start from the basics. One needs to know what is one's objective in the group . A good definition of your objective is - to be noticed, to have contributed meaningfully in an attempt to help the group reach the right consensus. What does this essentially mean? The first implication is that you should be noticed by the panel. Merely making a meaningful contribution and helping the group arrive at a consensus is not enough. You have to be seen by the evaluating panel to have made a meaningful contribution.

What does that mean in practice? You must ensure that the group hears you. If the group hears you, so will the evaluator. That does not mean that you shout at the top of your voice and be noticed for the wrong reasons. You have to be assertive. If you are not a very assertive person, you will have to simply learn to be assertive for those 15 minutes. Remember, assertiveness does not mean being bull-headed or being arrogant. And most importantly, you have to make your own chance. Many group discussion participants often complain that they did not get a chance to speak. The fact is that in no group discussion will any one

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invite you to speak. There is nothing more unacceptable in a GD than keeping one's mouth shut or just murmuring things which are inaudible.

Participate in as many practice GDs as possible before you attend the actual GD. There is nothing like practice to help you overcome the fear of talking in a GD.

The second important implication is that making just any sort of contribution is not enough. Your contribution has to be meaningful. A meaningful contribution suggests that:

- * You have a good knowledge base
- * You are able to put forth your arguments logically and are a good communicator.
- * The quality of what you said is more valuable than the quantity

Always enter the room with a piece of paper and a pen. In the first two minutes jot down as many ideas as you can. When you jot down points, keep these pointers in mind. Given a topic, where you are expected to take a stand, note down points for both sides of the argument. It will be useful on two counts -

- (i) If you do not start the GD and are not amongst the first five speakers and find that everyone in the group is talking for the topic, then it makes sense to take the alternate approach and oppose the topic even if you initially intended to talk for the topic.
- (ii) It helps to have knowledge of how group members who take a stand diametrically opposite to yours will put forth their argument and be prepared with counter arguments.

Everybody else will state the obvious. So highlight some points that are not obvious. The different perspective that you bring to the group will be highly appreciated by the panel. Some pointers on being relevant while having a different perspective are:

- Be careful that the "something different" you state is still relevant to the topic being debated.
- Can you take the group ahead if it is stuck at one point?
- Can you take it in a fresh and more relevant direction?
- You must be clearly seen to be

attempting to build a consensus.

- Gaining support or influencing colleagues is the mantra adopted by many a successful business Leaders.

Nobody expects a group of ten intelligent, assertive people, all with different points of view on a controversial subject to actually achieve a consensus. But what matters is "Did you make attempts to build a consensus?" The reason why an attempt to build a consensus is important is because in most work situations you will have to work with people in a team, accept joint responsibilities and make decisions as a group.

DOs and Don'ts to excel in Group Discussion (GD)

DOs

- ❖ During discussion make sure that you speak at least five or six times, contributing meaningfully towards discussion.
- ❖ Put your views persuasively, unobtrusively and modulate your voice accordingly.
- ❖ Be courteous, clear and appear confident to command respect.
- ❖ Have a good attitude. A person with a positive

- attitude can direct his thoughts; control his emotions and regulate his attitudes.
- ❖ Better to concentrate on one or two ideas at a time to avoid confusion in your development of thought.
 - ❖ Words are the vehicle of thought. Pay attention to what others are saying otherwise you may end up making statements that are irrelevant, and you will be labeled as inconsistent as well. Therefore, listen effectively. Try to encourage others without acting impatient. Simply nod and say “I see”, or other positive listening words.
 - ❖ When your views are challenged you must be able to defend your statement tactfully and convincingly. Be alert and show interest in what others are saying. Analyze your strong points and substantiate them by providing examples, and statistical data. Concentrate on what you want to say and how you want to say. Present your points in a logical order to make them interesting.
 - ❖ Try to set a good beginning and equally a good ending.
- ❖ Be natural, friendly and cheerful. Remember you have come to win friends, not to make foes.
 - ❖ Speak to the whole group looking at each candidate in turn. Effective eye contact is an important feedback device that makes the speaking situation a two-way communication process. Eye contact binds a speaker with his audience. The adage that eyes are the mirrors of your soul underlines the need for you to convince people with your eyes as well as your words. When you speak, your eyes also function as a control device. You can use it to assure your listeners attentiveness and concentration. At the end, finish with something that the group will remember.
- Don'ts**
- Resist annoying mannerism. fidgeting, scratching, picking, shuffling, avoiding eye contact. These are nervous traits. Avoid using filler words like: you know, I see, umm etc.
 - Don't jump upon conclusion to make sweeping generalization.

- If you are not comfortable with witty comment - avoid it.
- Don't interrupt others while they are making some points.
- Don't scream and use curse words, slang etc.
- Don't mumble and talk too softly. Similarly, a wailing or whining voice has an instant depressing effect on others.
- Don't speak just for the sake of speaking. Avoid making statements that do not add value to the discussion.
- Don't say: You are wrong/ you are being unfair/ I don't like your ideas. Rather refine your argument with: I understand what you mean and I think, I respect your opinion and I feel, I agree with you and I want to add.
- Don't ramble on and on, remember quality of the content is more important than the quantity of time you take to speak.
- Avoid gesturing unnecessarily. You need to be different from others but not in a negative manner.
- Don't pack up early.

General Tips

- ❖ A good level of general awareness will come in

handy so that you aren't at a loss of words on certain issues.

- ❖ Understand the topic and analyze it mentally before speaking.
- ❖ Be clear about the purpose and content of your viewpoint.
- ❖ One should be able to communicate his views in an effective manner to everyone. Be clear in speech, audible but not too loud and above all remain confident.
- ❖ Remember the six C's of effective communication -- Clarity, Completeness, Conciseness, Confidence, Correctness and Courtesy.
- ❖ You should maintain eye contact with all others in the group and not focus on a particular person.
- ❖ Be responsive to ideas from other people and be very receptive and open-minded; but don't allow others to change your own viewpoint.
- ❖ Starting the discussion is considered to be good; however it isn't that important; what is important is that you speak for a period long enough for you to be able to

communicate your viewpoint.

- ❖ Always maintain your calm and never get aggressive. If you haven't been able to talk then one can cut in saying "Excuse me, but what I think is" or something of that sort.
- ❖ Never lose your temper and never attack anyone on a personal front. Your attitude should be one of cooperation and not one of conflict.
- ❖ Don't lose sight of the goal of the discussion.
- ❖ Listen to any criticisms and give them a thought before trying to defend your views.

Conclusion

To perform well and score more in GD you should definitely know the following – “Why GD, how GD works, dos/ don'ts in GD, how to prepare for GD? mistakes commonly made in GD, tips for success in GD, skills evaluated from GD, and important topics for GD”.

Reference

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