

Assessment centres and psychometric tests

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Resources to help you with interview tests and exercises are available from your careers service and from On-line Tests: <http://gradireland.com/careers-advice/interviews-and-tests>;
see also: <https://www.prospects.ac.uk/careers-advice/interview-tips/interview-tests-and-exercises>

General guidelines as you approach any test or exercise include:

- Get a good night's sleep beforehand;
- Ensure that you are clear about the location of the test and how you will get there
- Try to remain relaxed but motivated throughout the day;
- Listen carefully to all of the instructions given;
- Read and re-read any written instructions to ensure you understand them;
- Seek clarification as early as possible if anything is unclear;
- Organise your time to complete each exercise at the start. Work to meet the deadline given;
- Be yourself - focus on your own performance, not that of the other candidates.

PSYCHOMETRIC TESTS

Psychometric tests are structured methods used by employers to assess each candidate's suitability for a job or programme. They may include aptitude or ability tests, personality questionnaires or a combination of both. Psychometric testing is usually one part of a multi-stage recruitment process. You can learn more from the British Psychological Society (BPS) [Psychological Testing Centre](#)

Aptitude/ability tests

- These are formal tests, completed on-line or on a printed answer sheet. They are designed to test your reasoning and cognitive capability, usually to a strict deadline. Each test is generally comprised of multiple choice questions. You will be given instructions before you start and there will be some example questions to try, with no time limit.
- On-line tests are often used as an early selection method. You will usually be asked to sit a similar test in person, should you progress to a later stage of assessment or selection.
- If you have special requirements, it is advisable to declare this beforehand. The organisation may be able to make adjustments, allow you extra time or grade your results more appropriately.
- The tests most commonly used in graduate recruitment are:
 - Verbal tests - such as verbal reasoning, analysis and word sort;
 - Numerical tests - such as reasoning, analysis and sequential tests;
 - Diagrammatic and spatial reasoning - testing your sense of logic and visual thinking and organisation skills;
 - Specific tests - for example syntax for computer programming, data checking or mechanics.

To get the best out of the test:

- If the employer has not indicated it, call to see if they will tell you broadly what types of test you will have to complete;

- Try as many practice exercises as possible using the resources below and any that you Careers Service has to offer;
- Work as quickly and as accurately as you can;
- If you get stuck on a question, move on and come back to it later if you have time (although be aware that often you cannot go backwards in an online test);
- You must often make a sacrifice between speed and accuracy – recruiters may deduct marks for incorrect answers

Practice aptitude tests

There are a range of links below to practice tests. Most have free examples. Some may incur a small charge to use:

General Psychometrics Resources:

Psychometric Advantage	www.psychometricadvantage.co.uk/
Psychometric Success	www.psychometric-success.com/
SHL	www.shldirect.com/practice_tests.html
Morrisby	www.morrisby.com/
Saville Consulting	www.savilleconsulting.com/index.aspx
Aptitude Tests On-line	https://www.aptitude-test.com/
Cubiks	http://practicetests.cubiks.com/

Sample Tests

Gradireland	https://gradireland.com/careers-advice
University of Kent	www.kent.ac.uk/careers/psychotests.htm

Sector/Career Related Resources:

EfinancialCareers	http://tinyurl.com/efinancial
Institute of Practitioners in Advertising	http://www.ipa.co.uk/
Diagonal Thinking Test	www.diagonalthinking.co.uk/

Selection Tests for Education

MBA GMAT Tests	http://www.mba.com/global/the-gmat-exam.aspx
Crack GMAT	www.crack-gmat.com/
UKCAT Clinical Tests for Medicine & Dentistry	www.ukcat.ac.uk
Educational Testing Service including Assessments for GRE and To EFL	www.ets.org/

PERSONALITY QUESTIONNAIRES

- These are not tests but indicators of your personality type. They may have a time limit for completion. There are no right or wrong answers - the questionnaire is intended to give the employer a profile of your interests and your working style.

- Usually you will be asked a set of questions or be given a series of statements or options to choose between. You may feel that you are being presented with the same questions or options in different ways over and over again. This is to establish consistency in your responses to get a more accurate indication of your preferences.

Some guidelines for approaching personality questionnaires:

- Try out some questionnaires in advance using the links below. They may not be exactly what the selector will use but will give you practice in doing them;
- Answer each question in relaxed or “shoes-off” mode;
- Be yourself - avoid trying to predict what would be a good or bad response. Go with your gut instinct and answer honestly;
- If any question or option confuses you don't agonise over it – move on to the next selection and come back to it later if you have time.

Practice personality assessment sites include:

Keirsey Temperament Sorter	www.advisorteam.com/user/ktsintro.asp
Team Technology	www.teamtechnology.co.uk/personality-tests.html
Finding Potential	www.findingpotential.com
Humanmetrics	www.humanmetrics.com
People Maps	www.peoplemaps.com
Internet IQ and Personality Tests	http://www.3smartcubes.com/
Psychology Today	www.psychologytoday.com/pto/self_tests.php

PRESENTATIONS

Designing and delivering a presentation may be part of the selection process. You may be told the topic in advance, be asked to select your own or be given a topic on the day and a little time to prepare it. The following tips may be useful:

Preparation & Research:

- Find out what format the presentation may take, what technology and materials will be available to you and how long you will have;
- Establish who the audience will be – if it will just be the selectors or if other candidates will also attend;
- Check out whether you will have access to PowerPoint or can bring any other visual aids with you. If you are, or can train yourself to be, a charismatic speaker you will need less aids to make an impact;
- Practice your presentation – ideally in front of a careers adviser or just someone who can be constructively critical and help you to sharpen your performance. Get comfortable with whatever visual aids you are using.

Design:

- If you have a free choice of topic choose a subject you know well - you will be asked questions about your presentation;
- Think about what you will do to keep the audience's attention. Pitch the content at a level appropriate to them;
- What core concept/concepts do you want the audience to leave with? It is better to expand on two or three memorable points than to have a long rambling narrative;
- Think about the purpose – whether you want to persuade/educate/inspire/inform/influence or all of these;
- Your presentation should have a clear introduction, a main body and a conclusion. Assessors will be looking for something well-structured with a logical flow;
- If using PowerPoint or transparencies be judicious: only use bullet points and key words or phrases. Slides are used to support what you say, not be a substitute for it;
- Enhance any slides used with pictures, photos, graphs and screen-grabs as appropriate;
- Avoid too much detail. Be clear and concise and build your presentation to a strict time frame;
- If you are thinking of having some audience participation remember to prepare and bring any materials that you will need to use;
- Think about any supplementary information: do you want to give out notes to the audience? When will you distribute them?

Delivery:

- Be conscious of your body language – how you deliver your presentation is as important as what you say. Smile, maintain good posture, act confidently, speak clearly, keep good eye contact and try to relate to each person individually. If you tend to fidget try and control this, staying natural and composed.

Pace yourself. Introduce yourself and your presentation confidently. Avoid just launching straight into the content. This will help to steady any nerves. You could say something like: 'Good afternoon. My name is Jane White, and I'm going to speak to you for about ten minutes on the subject of my final year dissertation. I'll be happy to answer any questions you may have at the end.'

- Do not read from a prepared script – if absolutely necessary bring notes or prompt cards with bullet pointed headings to glance at if needed;
- Have a few relaxation techniques to use should you find yourself getting anxious. If you find that nerves overcome you just say so. Ask to stop for a few moments whilst you gather your thoughts;
- Wind down your presentation confidently, rather than stopping suddenly when you run out

of things to say. Even if you are nervous and glad that it is over, make a brief and clear conclusion.

- Summarise what you have presented and then say something like: 'That concludes my presentation. Thank you for listening. Are there any questions?'

Finally:

Presentations are sometimes also used during interviews. You may be given time to prepare your presentation in advance or be given a case study or topic at the start and be asked present your thoughts to the interviewers.

Similarly, following any group exercise, you may be asked to present your findings with the others in the group. The procedure will be the same as for individual presentations. Make sure that everyone knows what they have to say, and in which order you will present. Unless instructed otherwise, try to ensure that each person has an input, rather than one person presenting on behalf of the group.

One of the best ways to perfect your public speaking ability is to join your local Toastmasters group. See Toastmasters International - <http://www.toastmasters.org/>

ASSESSMENT CENTRES

Some organisations use assessment centres in their recruitment process. They may last one or two days or even longer and are usually held after the first round of interviews and before the final selection. They may also be used as an initial selection process. You will be asked to engage in a number of activities and exercises during which multiple assessors will observe and rate your performance.

Assessment centres typically include a number of elements:

- Social/informal events: where you meet a variety of people, including other candidates, the assessors, recent graduates and the wider staff and management team. Be aware that you are being assessed at all times. Be friendly but not over-familiar. There may be free drinks on offer - resist the temptation to over-indulge. See also Section 4 Group Activities.
- Information sessions: provide more detail about the organisation and the roles available. Listen carefully, as the information provided may be useful during the rest of the day.
- Tests and exercises: designed to reveal your ability and potential. Assessors measure you against a set of competencies. Each exercise is designed to assess one or more of these areas. Do not worry if you think you perform badly at any stage - it is likely that you will have the chance to compensate later on. Find out if your careers service offers practice aptitude test sessions or presentation skills workshops. See also Section 5 below: Exercises.
- If you have a disability that may affect your performance in any of the exercises mentioned, discuss the matter with the employer before attending the assessment centre.

A typical assessment day

- Content, length and structure of assessment centres varies greatly. Here is the outline of one graduate employer's employer's tips and advice for assessment centres. This is an illustrative example only:

Preparation

- Visit the company's website and read the recruitment and other relevant information.
- Draw up a list of your main strengths, particularly those you think are relevant to the area for which you have applied.
- Consider any areas of potential improvement and think about how you will address them.
- Think of questions you may want answers to at this stage.
- Plan your journey carefully so that you arrive in good time for the start of the assessment centre.
- Try to converse with other candidates - this will help when it comes to group exercises later.

What to expect

- You will be one of six to eight candidates and there will be four assessors - these are usually managers from the department to which you have applied.
- You will be interviewed and to asked to take part in a number of exercises, including a numerical reasoning test. The exercises will be based on the type of work for which you have applied.
- The exercises, usually undertaken with a number of other candidates, will take the form of an in-tray or case study exercise, a presentation and a group discussion.
- At the end of the assessment, you will be asked for feedback on the process. This will not impact on any decisions that are made about your performance and honest comments are encouraged.

Your performance

- You do not need to prepare anything specific for the assessment centre. You are not being assessed on what you know but on how you think. Be yourself (at your best).
- Listen carefully to the instructions given to you at the start of the day and always read the information you are given thoroughly.
- Not everyone is good at certain exercises, but remember that the assessment centre will give you a number of chances to show your strengths and meet our criteria.
- Remain focused and motivated for the whole day. You will find it tiring, but your level of motivation will be assessed throughout.
- You are not being measured against the other candidates but against certain predetermined criteria. It is quite possible that every candidate will achieve the necessary standard, in which case offers will be made to all.
- You will learn how you react in different situations. You may find you have previously unidentified strengths about the company. Recruitment is a two-way process. You will have the opportunity to talk with the assessors and to meet a number of recent graduates with whom you can talk informally over dinner. (The dinner is not part of the assessment, but it will give you a chance to learn what life in the company is like and whether it is for you.) about the activities in which you may be involved if you are offered a position with us. The assessment is loosely based on samples of real work

Criteria

The following are examples of the skills and traits that selectors could be assessing you on at the assessment centre:

Team-working

- Communication
- Leadership
- Time-management
- Listening
- Motivation and enthusiasm
- Data analysis
- Decision-making
- Influencing
- Creativity
- Integrity
- Initiative

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Group activities

- Employers use group activities, generally during assessment centres, to assess your interpersonal communication skills. Quite simply they need to know that you can mix well with people and earn their respect. You may have to complete a practical task, complete a case study (see Case Study Exercises below) or take part in a discussion. Some employers will use a social event or activity to observe your behaviour.
- Be aware that you are being assessed from the moment they meet you. Be well versed on the organisation, its sector and current affairs. Have interesting questions to ask of the organisation's representatives. Avoid the temptation to just chat to the other candidates.
- Throughout the exercise they will observe your ability to work in a team and the type of leadership style you demonstrate. They will also be noting how you negotiate with your peers and how you get your point across.
- Remember: good team working is about working together co-operatively to achieve a common goal. You can demonstrate leadership within the team by:
- Showing that you are listening carefully and *hearing* what is being said

- Taking the initiative
- Facilitating others to speak
- Reflecting on what has been discussed and summarising periodically if necessary
- Staying positive and motivated throughout

Use the following tips to help you prepare:

- Read through and/or listen carefully to all the information you are given and make notes if allowed;
- Decide objectives and priorities. Agree the division of tasks, make a plan and follow it;
- Be assertive and persuasive, but also diplomatic – be conscious of the volume and tone of what you say;
- Remember that the quality of what you have to say is more important than the quantity – don't confuse input with impact. Choose your timing carefully;
- Make sure the group keeps to time. Help to steer things back on track if the discussion goes off track;
- Keep calm, and use your sense of humour where appropriate;
- Find a balance between advancing your own ideas and helping the group to complete the task;
- Actively listen to what everyone has to say, using nods, smiles and eye contact. Try to get the best contribution from everyone and do not assume that quiet members have nothing to contribute. Be inclusive.

If a group member is dominating the conversation then try to support the participation of others – i.e. 'I hear what you are saying there and I am wondering does anyone else have an alternative suggestion on this'

- Use positive language and behaviour. Think about how you phrase things e.g. rather than saying
- 'I don't agree with that' or 'I think you're wrong' you might say 'I'm wondering if we could consider taking a slightly different approach here'.
- Be conscious of your own style and its impact on the group. If you are naturally very chatty maybe you need to focus more on listening. If you are very quiet remember that you need to speak up to make an impact on the assessors.
- Practical tasks.
- You may be asked as a group to use equipment or materials to make something - a tower, using only straws and string, for example. The assessors are usually more interested in how the group interacts than in the outcome of the task. They will also be assessing your planning and problem-solving skills and the creativity of your individual ideas. Get involved, however trivial you consider the task to be.
- Discussions and role plays.
- You may be asked to take part in a leaderless discussions or in a role-playing exercise which simulates a professional scenario. You will usually be given a briefing pack and be asked to play a particular part. You may have to act out the role either with the other candidates or with the assessors either one-on-one or in a group. The assessors are looking for your individual contribution as well as your communication and influencing skills.

Individual Exercises

Case studies and in-tray or e-tray exercises are business simulation tasks. They are designed to examine skills such as; communication, organisational ability, problem-solving, data analysis, planning, time management and decision making. They are usually time bound. After the task you may be asked to explain your rationale for how you handled it.

Case study exercises

In these exercises, you will be given a set of documents relating to a hypothetical or real-life situation. You are likely to be asked to analyse it and to give brief verbal or written report of your recommendations. You may be asked to complete the case study individually or as part of a group. Some employers will set case study exercises as a discrete element of the selection process. Others may combine them with an interview.

See an example of this process. http://www.mckinsey.com/careers/join_us/interview_process

Tips for tackling a case study:

- Practice with sample case studies in advance and brush up on your numeracy skills;
- Research the organisation, its markets and be up to speed on current affairs;
- Read the instructions carefully and thoroughly;
- Read any background information you are given about the organisation, the staff and your role. Focus on key points, and make brief notes. This will help you to get a feel for what is important;
- Scan through all items to get an overall view of everything that will need to be considered;
- Try to stay calm. Keep a note of the time to ensure you pace yourself correctly;
- Work as quickly and as accurately as you can;
- When presenting your conclusions or discussing your rationale be as clear as possible and don't be afraid to disagree with the selector if you feel you have made the right decision.
- In-tray/e-tray exercises
- These are business simulation exercises in which you are given an in-tray or electronic inbox full of emails, company memos, telephone and fax messages, reports and correspondence. You will be provided with information about the structure of the organisation and your place within it. You are expected to take decisions, prioritise your workload, draft replies, delegate tasks, and recommend actions.
- Each exercise is designed to test how you handle complex information within a limited time. It allows you to demonstrate that you can analyse facts and figures, prioritise information and make good decisions under pressure.

Tips for tackling an in-tray exercise:

- Read the instructions carefully and thoroughly;
- Try to stay calm. Keep a note of the time to ensure you pace yourself correctly;
- Read any background information you are given about the organisation, the staff and your role. Focus on key points, and make brief notes;
- Scan through all items in the in-tray or email inbox to get an overall view of everything that will need to be considered;
- Prioritise according to what is most important and most urgent. Decide what can be delegated, forwarded or deferred;
- Identify key issues and any action that must be taken - detailing how, by whom and any timescales or deadlines;
- Highlight any possible resource restraints, conflicts between tasks, or implications for the organisation;

- If asked to draft a written response to any item, identify the main points of your response quickly and expand concisely on these. Keep it as brief as possible – it is easy to get absorbed in this task but be wary of time;
- Remember: there is often no right or wrong answer. Demonstrate that you have identified key issues, and give your reasons for all the decisions you make;
- Work as quickly and as accurately as you can.

In-tray exercise resources

Some careers services have an online practice test available on their websites:

http://www.careers.manchester.ac.uk/media/services/careersandemployabilitydivision/careersservice/crcp_publications/startingpointseriesofhandouts/jobsearch/In-Tray-Exercise.pdf

<http://www.careers.manchester.ac.uk/applicationsinterviews/assessmentcentres/>

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/careers/recruitment/assess/types-exercise/in-tray>

Assessment Day Free example in-tray exercise;

<http://www.assessmentday.co.uk/in-tray-exercise.htm>

Essays/written exercises

Some employers may ask you to write an essay or letter on a topic of your choice or one given by them. Others may give you a document to review and improve. Here the selectors are testing how you express yourself, your spelling and grammar and whether you can communicate professionally and effectively.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Psychological Testing Centre	www.psychtesting.org.uk
Assessment Day Resource: Psychometric Testing & Assessment Centres	www.assessmentday.co.uk
Wikijob Guide to the Recruitment Process	www.wikijob.co.uk
SHL Assessment Tools	www.shldirect.com
Guardian Brain Training	www.lumosity.com/
Target Jobs – preparing for Psychometric tests	http://targetjobs.co.uk/careers-advice/psychometric-tests

Links to Assessment Centre Exercises;

<http://www.kent.ac.uk/careers/selection.htm>

www.assessmentday.co.uk

<http://www.bath.ac.uk/students/careers/succeed-in-selection/tests/test-prep/index.html>