
UNIT 3 GROUP DISCUSSIONS AND MEETINGS

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Group Discussions (GDs)
 - 3.2.1 GDs at Interviews and GDs in General: Functional Differences
 - 3.2.2 Essentials of a Group Discussion
 - 3.2.3 What to Say and How to Say It
 - 3.2.4 Group Communication Skills
 - 3.2.4.1 Overcome Differences in Communication Style
 - 3.2.4.2 Acknowledge Differences in Gender and Culture
 - 3.2.4.3 Effective Involvement
 - 3.2.5 Maintaining Roles in a Group
 - 3.2.6 Group Processing and Assessment
- 3.3 Meetings
 - 3.3.1 Agenda of a Meeting
 - 3.3.2 Preparing for a Meeting
- 3.4 Reading: Role of Participants
- 3.5 Vocabulary
- 3.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.7 Answers

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, we will first take up Group Discussions and cover the following topics:

- Planning what to say and how to say it in a group discussion
- Maintaining roles
- Group communication skills
- Group Processing and assessment

We then take up Meetings, where we will discuss:

- Agenda of a meeting
- Preparing for a meeting

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Group Discussion

You might have often chatted with your friends on various topics. It could be

about the prospects of a course, about a film or a book, pros and cons of politics and so on. As humans we love to talk and express our ideas on issues of our interest. In the process we learn about others' points of view on the same, agree or disagree with them, and help ourselves with a more definite understanding of a situation or a problem.

When you interact with many people on a topic a lot of ideas get generated. If done in a systematic way, these ideas prove beneficial in many ways such as solving problems or creating new avenues. When the conversation is intended to serve an objective in an organized manner, it transcends being a mere 'chat' and is called a group discussion.

A group discussion is a means of interaction within a team or between various teams in an organization. It often determines managerial success. It is a common procedure in competitive exams and job-interviews and is a standard component towards the end of an interview, which the short listed candidates have to take.

The interviewers and examiners nowadays find it necessary to evaluate a candidate's capability to work as a member of a team. Through such group discussions the interviewer looks for the candidates'

- Knowledge and awareness about a topic
- Creative aptitude
- Ability to work as a member of a team
- Ability to lead a team, especially as an opinion leader
- Conferencing skills

To make a group discussion successful you should have good listening skills, an approach to contribute ideas, and show a positive interdependence. You need to convey your thoughts in a meaningful way, and at the same time as a member of a team.

As a result a group discussion is a very useful technique to fulfill many purposes. For example, it is used to

- Generate ideas (in preparation for something such as a film or a seminar)
- Summarize
- Assess levels of skill and understanding
- Reexamine ideas presented earlier
- Review a situation
- Process learning outcomes of a session
- Compare and contrast theories, issues and interpretations
- Brainstorm applications of theory to life

Group Discussion



3.2 GROUP DISCUSSIONS (GDs)

3.2.1 GDs at Interviews and GDs in General: Functional Differences

We have said that group discussions can form a part of a meeting, or form a part of the interview process. Although group discussions (GDs) in general and GDs in an interview have a similar structure, they have some functional differences. In a classroom or an organization the purpose of a GD is to generate thinking, enhance group communication skills, facilitate a successful exchange of ideas and derive a conclusion. It may not be very formal as the members as well as the observer are known to each other.

GDs can also be part of competitive examinations and job interviews. In the civil services, MBA admission process and Armed Forces and Private Sector examinations, GDs are conducted to observe a candidate's suitability for the course or the job. Hereafter GD in job interviews and GD in examinations will be referred together as GD in interviews.

The various functional differences can be categorized as follows:

GD in an organization or classroom	GD in interviews
1) The main purpose is to <u>generate thinking</u> on a particular topic.	The main purpose is to see who <u>communicates well</u> in a group.
2) The role of an observer may be maintained by a <u>member</u> within the group. In a class discussion, the <u>instructor</u> also observes group interaction and gives feedback.	The <u>interviewers</u> maintain the role of the observers. There may not be any feedback given to the candidates, except the interview result.
3) The roles of a team captain, a recorder, an encourager or a reflector are <u>decided in advance</u> , either by the group members or by the instructor.	The roles are not defined before the discussion. They <u>come up</u> according to the candidates' capabilities.
4) The topics depend upon the organization's interests, related to the group's work and responsibilities or the instructor's <u>requirements in a classroom</u> .	The topics are chosen in such a way that everyone is expected to be aware of it. For example, a topic related to current affairs.
5) The members know each other fairly well, so there is <u>no introduction required</u> at the beginning. By referring to a person who had made a relevant point, the discussion encourages further interaction in the group.	Usually the <u>members introduce themselves</u> when they speak. Mentioning the name of a member while referring to her/him might help the interviewers determine your listening skills.

3.2.2 Essentials of a Group Discussion

In recent times group discussion has emerged as an important and potent tool for testing candidates for recruitment as this technique at one go analyzes almost all the behaviour competencies and some of the generic skills we have already described in earlier units. Therefore your awareness of what this technique is, how it works and how to participate in GD becomes essential for a successful performance.

There are certain conditions that must be met for a group discussion to be successful. Some of these conditions are dictated by the nature of the task, but there are some general points you must remember in order to be a successful participant. These are:

- a) There is only one topic for discussion
- b) All the members must express their views only on **this topic** under discussion.
- c) Members must take turns to talk; they must listen to one another, talk to one another and respond to one another.
- d) They must put forward more than one point of view on the topic.

Members of the group must also follow certain rules for the success of the group discussion. These are:

- a) **Equality, freedom to express, and respect for participating members.**

The participants are all treated as equals and must have regard for the opinions of each member of the group. The participants are free to offer their opinions without fear or anxiety, pressure, ridicule or embarrassment.

- b) **Reasonableness, orderliness and truthfulness**

All the participants must come to the group discussion with an open mind; they are not to be dogmatic or have pre-determined opinions; they all must be willing to listen to reason and to accommodate others' views on the subject. The participants must observe order and take turns to talk; must listen to others and not shout down opinions they do not like. The participants must speak what they believe to be true; they must not remain silent, be reticent or vague in their views.

Anything that violates the spirit of free and open discussion or joint enquiry breaches the spirit of GD and one must guard against this. Some examples of breach of rules are –

- i) interrupting the speaker or not allowing the speaker to complete his/her contribution.
- ii) shouting down people whose views one does not like.
- iii) refusing to listen to reason and/or evidence.
- iv) dogmatic in one's own opinion even in the face of evidence to the contrary.
- v) agreeing to a point without believing in it or under duress or threat.

This does not mean that you cannot 'interrupt' someone. You can do so at the appropriate moment and without causing offense.

The discussion group can take up any topic for discussion provided the topic poses a question and requires a joint enquiry. A discussion question invites joint enquiry whereas other forms of discussion e.g. debates discourage it. Hence a discussion question has to be an interrogative sentence, not a word or phrase. It must **not** be framed as a ‘yes/no’ or ‘either/or’ question and must **not** be broad or ambiguous.

Check Your Progress 1

Read the text once again a bit slowly this time and attempt the following:-

- 1) Are the following statements true or false according to the text? If false, rewrite the true version.
 - i) You must not question what the Manager says in GD.
 - ii) All GD members, juniors and seniors, are treated equal.
 - iii) In GD, it is better not to say anything that may offend the management.
 - iv) You should stick to your point of view even if you feel that you are wrong.
 - v) In GD, there is only one topic for discussion.
- 2) Are the following topics suitable for Group Discussion? Why/Why not?
 - i) Higher education
 - ii) Should we develop rural or urban areas in India?
 - iii) Tourism
 - iv) How can India become self-sufficient in energy resources?
 - v) Research in health issues should be left to the private sector.

3.2.3 What to Say and How to Say It

You can begin by saying:

- 1) To begin with, I would say, ...
 - 2) The first thing that comes to my mind when I think of ...
 - 3) We may think that it's the government's responsibility to deal with corruption but...
 - 4) Let us first look at the facts known to us, for example, ..
 - 5) A very good morning to all of you. I strongly support... because...
- If you speak after someone you can continue with*
- 6) “As my friend has just said/spoken persuasively about/argued...
- To involve others in your thinking you may say*
- 7) “You will all agree with me that...”

You can begin in a way that suits your own style of speaking. Try to include others in your conversation to convey that you are open to others' views as well. You can also do this by using ‘we’ and ‘us’ instead of ‘I’ and ‘me’. It is important that whatever you say fulfills a purpose (gives information, agrees or disagrees with a point already mentioned, illustrates a point or justifies your actions).

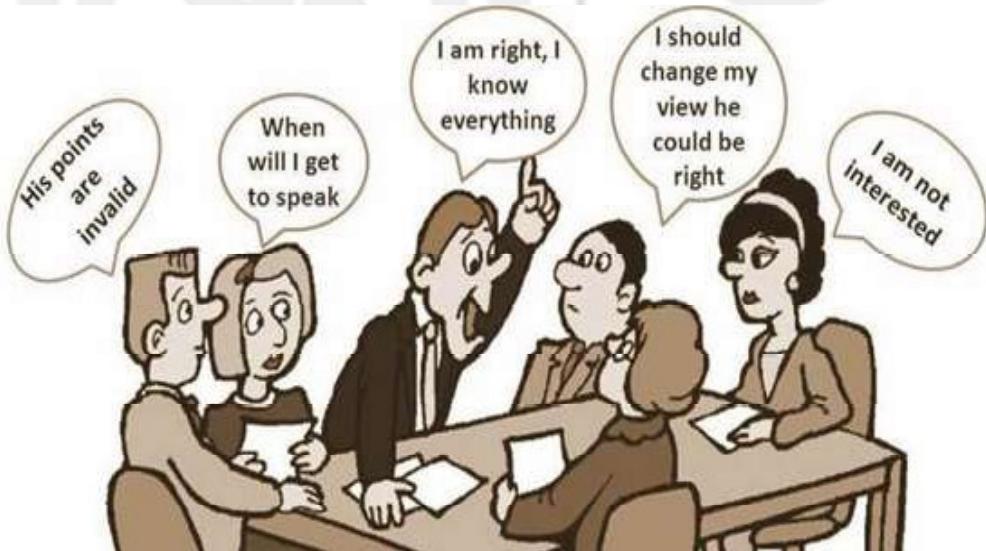
You need to consider the five **whats** given below:

- What is known to some or most of the participants?
- What may be unacceptable to some or most of the participants?
- What level of detail is needed?
- What depth ideas is required to deal with possible questions related to the topic?
- What must be said at a point, and what is to be retained for the appropriate time?

Asking for **clarification** is very important when you do not understand what another person has said. You should also respect others' contributions to the discussion even if you may not agree with everyone. Remember to address the points rather than the persons. Try to give equal time to everyone in the group for speaking. During the discussion, you may use phrases like:

- 1) I would like to add a point here, ...
- 2) As you have rightly said ...
- 3) I think we forgot to consider the fact that ...
- 4) Coming back to Nikhil's point that examinations should not be mere memory tests...

As you can see, the phrase in (1) is useful to make an additional point, and can be used even to interrupt a speaker. So is (2), which agrees with the previous speaker and adds a point. The phrases in (3) and (4) come in useful to continue the discussion from an earlier point, after a slight gap. Perhaps you wanted to say something but didn't want to interrupt the speaker. With these words, you may refer back to the person and her point when you speak again.



Here are some more suggestions of language which can be used in a group discussion.

Stating an opinion

- It seems to me...
- In my view...

- I tend to think...
- It's obvious that...
- I believe....
- Clearly ...

Interrupting

- Excuse me, may I ask for a clarification on this...
- If I may interrupt...
- Sorry to interrupt but.....

Handling Interruptions

- Sorry, please let me finish.....
- If I may finish what I am saying.....
- Could you please allow me to complete what I'm saying.....?

Moving the discussion on

- Can we go on to think about.....?
- I think we should now move on to consider.....

Expressing Agreement

- I totally agree
- I agree entirely
- I quite agree
- I couldn't agree more
- Absolutely / precisely /exactly
- I think you're right

Expressing disagreement

- I don't agree at all
- I totally disagree
- I think quite differently on this
- I don't really think so
- I'm afraid I can't agree with you there

Checking comprehension / reformulating

- To put that another way...
- If I follow you correctly...
- So what you're saying is...
- Does that mean...?
- Are you saying...?

Making a suggestion

- I suggest that....
- We could.....

- Perhaps we should...
- It might be worth....
- What about.....?
- Why don't we.....?

Activity 1

Here is an excerpt from a group discussion. Read it well and answer the questions that follow.

Observer : “The topic given to you is ‘Should children be allowed to watch TV?’ You need to discuss this in your group for 30 minutes and come to a conclusion.”

Speaker 1 : Good morning friends. In my opinion children should be allowed to watch TV because there are many programmes on TV that are instructive and educative. Cartoons and certain serials are very much liked by children and such sources of entertainment cannot be denied to children. After all they have a right to enjoy TV. Channels like Discovery and National Geographic show very good programmes and provide a lot of general knowledge to children. However parents have to ensure that children watch TV for a short time only.

Speaker 2 : Hello friends, I am of the opinion that watching TV does not help children much. There are many programmes that mislead children. If they are allowed to watch TV, they get habituated to it and lose interest in physical activities. Moreover, watching more TV affects the reading habits of children. They slowly lose their concentration on studies too. Children try to imitate their role models in style and looks, which might become an expensive affair for the parents if not checked early.

From the points mentioned above by Speakers 1 and 2, make a list of those that you agree with:

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

And those that you don't agree with:

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Who do you agree with more, Speaker 1 or Speaker 2?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Now can you add a few more points to strengthen your views about the topic?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

How do you think the discussion will end? Write one or two lines in illustration.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

3.2.4 Group Communication Skills

Positive interdependence is when a group either sinks or swims together. It is met in a group as its members share a task, a goal and common resources. Therefore a feeling of oneness is important in the group members. This also helps them to develop a positive way of speaking in a discussion. For example, using ‘We’ instead of ‘I’ or ‘You’ will show the feeling of positive interdependence. Disagreements are a common possibility in any group discussion. These need to be dealt with in a positive way too. Aggressive behaviour affects a healthy discussion. Remember to address the point of disagreement rather than the person who makes it. **Disagreements** should be reframed in constructive ways:

Say	Instead of
1) I don't think I agree. Could you please explain...	That doesn't make sense at all
2) I disagree because ...	That is not true.
3) I see it differently because...	No, I don't agree.
4) I think we should check what we are supposed to do.	That is not what we are asked to do.
5) It might be better to...	You are dead wrong.
6) Have you considered...	How can you say this?
7) Does everyone agree?	Let's vote on it.
8) I understand how you feel, but I think you might also consider...	That really upsets me!

To be aware of possible differences among group members will help you to frame your ideas well.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The topic given to you is “Coaching is necessary for academic studies and competitive exams”.

Generate as many ideas as you can on the topic and write them down as they come to your mind (you need not write complete sentences).

.....

- 2) Now arrange the points in order to arrive at one of the two conclusions below:

i) Coaching is necessary because

.....

ii) Coaching is not needed because

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

- 3) Now think of speaking about your ideas to a group. Start by stating what you are going to say.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

3.2.4.1 Overcome Differences in Communication Style

By differences in communication style we mean that everyone does not express their thoughts in the same way. Some ‘think aloud’ composing their thoughts on the fly. That is, they state their views as they think and feel. Since they are comfortable with forceful manner of speaking, they may be uncomfortable with silence in a group. Such an extroverted communication style is completely different from one where people love to ponder on an issue or listen to what everyone else has to say before they speak their mind. They have an introverted communication style and long periods of silence doesn’t disturb them.

As a group member you have to remember that only when you appreciate varied communication styles can you achieve balanced contributions to a group. Occasionally you may step out of your form to encourage each other to participate. Group members with an extroverted style need to periodically relax and silently deliberate on an issue. Those with an introverted style need to periodically encourage themselves (if not be encouraged by others!) to contribute, even if they haven’t worked out the problem fully in their heads yet.

3.2.4.2 Acknowledge Differences in Gender and Culture

You may face culture differences when you interact in a group from different cultural backgrounds. This can sometimes make communication difficult. Growing up in a different region, state or country generates differential communication styles. Your style may be quite different from what you face at the time of discussion. Degrees of bluntness, assertiveness in speech, preferences for direct or indirect (roundabout) conversation styles may be some of the patterns based on community upbringing.

You need to remain open to talk in spite of such differences. A group member who is sensitive towards these differences will value this uniqueness and will not hesitate to share his or her ideas with the other members.

It is very common to take up roles in groups based on gender socialization. You may rely on communication styles with which you are most comfortable in *social settings*. However, groups work together best when group members experiment with a variety of roles in groups, even those with which they don't have as much experience.

3.2.4.3 Effective Involvement

Expressing one's views must be well balanced with listening to others, to reach at an understanding as a group. On the other hand, agreeing to any statement offered without any effort to analyze its worth can misfire everything. For an effective group discussion you need to adopt a middle road between the two: one that monopolizes and the other that is passive. An extended conversation that is gradual and steady helps to lead to the integration and synthesis of views. Through an effective discussion, creative, high-energy, and effective learning occurs among all members of the group. In short, a participant of a group discussion needs to ensure that (s)he has group communication skills. For that he or she can check whether he or she has fulfilled the following points after the discussion:

- Incorporated prior knowledge into discussion
- Asked questions in an open-minded way
- Built on the comments of other group members to enhance discussion
- Volunteered ideas in a Constructive manner.
- Helped to summarize the group's progress.
- Identified any missing information in the group answer.

3.2.5 Maintaining Roles in a Group

You may be required to play different roles in a group discussion. The roles are decided before the discussion begins.

- The role of a *team captain* is to keep the group focused on the task. He or she also manages time and mediates conflict.
- The role of a *recorder* is to take down the salient points. He or she also reports back to the group as a whole.
- The *encourager* gives feedback to the group members. He or she is responsible for ensuring that all group members are heard.
- The *reflector* keeps track of dynamics of group process and makes comments about focus, direction, organization, listening skills and participation of all members.

Once a role is decided upon you, try not to switch over to other roles.

In an interview GD, these roles are not decided before but come up according to the candidates' abilities. You may show an interest in playing all the roles or just

one. The role of the team captain is one of leadership. The recorder and the encourager support the smooth functioning of a GD and the reflector steers the process.

These roles are extremely important in a GD that is a part of a meeting. They help to fulfill the objectives of the discussion.

3.2.6 Group Processing and Assessment

Group processing and group assessment is very important to develop effective communication in a group. To assess your group after a group discussion you need to reflect on each other's

- contribution
- way of speaking
- attitude.

This will also help you to understand the role of an observer in a group discussion, especially in an interview GD. As you get feedback from others about your performance in the group you can ponder on your strong and weak points. You can identify your communication style and attitude towards others' views. Listening to each other will facilitate your learning. Questions such as 'What is working?' 'What isn't working?' and 'How can the groups function more effectively?' can be raised for assessment. You can also prepare a group report in this way to determine the areas on which further work is needed.

Check Your Progress 3

Read the following excerpt from a group discussion and observe the different capabilities of the speakers. Give your assessment of each speaker on the basis of skills such as leadership, decision making, logical reasoning and convincing skills. You can explore the traits that are optimistic, constructive, visionary, practical, acceptable and progressive. Then give an overall assessment of the speaker.

The group consists of Koyel, Nirmal, Suman, Rekha, Bhargav, Bala and Jeet. After the topic is chosen, the discussion begins with Suman breaking the ice:

Above all you must not forget that what you say is more important than how you say it. So pay more attention in generating more ideas and views on the topic given, and improve your presentation through practice in a group.

- i) **Suman:** Hi friends! I strongly believe that child care is the sole responsibility of the parents. Every living creature takes care of its young ones. You will agree with me that parents feel responsible to mould their children into healthy, happy and successful human beings with love, respect and care.
- ii) **Nirmal:** Friends, to my mind, child care is the responsibility of everyone. The child is a hope for the parents, the country, and above all mankind. Therefore everyone should take care of it. The contribution of people other than parents right from its childhood makes the child emerge as a good human being, as an artist, a writer, a scientist or an inventor. Teachers, guides and other concerned people must fulfill their share of responsibilities to make the child a successful man or woman. Parents are responsible of

taking basic care of their children but they are not the only people responsible for the child's mental and physical development.

- iii) **Jeet:** Good afternoon to all! I agree with Suman and also with Nirmal that childcare is definitely the responsibility of the parents. Only their parents provide children with the basic requirements i.e., food, health, clothing and education. They are also responsible to give them a safe and carefree childhood. They take them to doctors when they are sick and bear all their expenditure till they stand on their own feet and get married. They have given birth to the child and they hold themselves responsible for both their success and failure.
- iv) **Rekha:** Dear friends, I have heard all of you who have spoken so far. I agree that parents do their best to provide the child with everything they can to make their children all rounders. But the basic necessities are not enough for a child's growth. They are of primary importance, but a child cannot develop completely if s/he does not acquire intellectual and technical skills. These may or may not be provided by parents. In order to develop these skills a child must interact with more and more different types of people. The teacher also influences the child. It is the responsibility of every adult to encourage the intellectual development of the child.
- v) **Bala:** Good afternoon everyone. I believe that childcare is parent's responsibility. They have to take care of the child as they have given birth to it. They take up the responsibilities of their children so that the children will look after them in their old age. Everybody is selfish in this world. The children are the future of the parents and so they give due care to see them grow as healthy and wealthy citizens.
- vi) **Suman:** I have listened to comments on both sides and I still hold the stand that childcare is parents' responsibility. The parents are the closest to a child and so their role is the most important in making the child an asset to the nation and to mankind. Apart from providing the basic necessities they also support the child to fight all adverse situations in life. In my opinion, family values and strong bonding is the most important step in the development of a child and this is done mostly by the parents.

Check Your Progress 4

Read this excerpt again and answer the questions below:

- 1) Can you guess the topic that was given for the GD?

.....
.....

- 2) Who do you think has displayed good group communication skills?

.....
.....
.....
.....

3.3 MEETINGS

A meeting forms a part of the various activities of an organization and serves to bring together the members of the organization to fulfill one or more objectives. It is useful when:

- Opinions from members become necessary to decide on an issue
- Participation of members becomes important to solve a problem
- Explaining previous matters becomes important before taking a decision
- The organization needs to settle conflicts
- The organization needs to communicate sensitive information
- The organization needs to generate new ideas



Meetings as well as group discussions basically help us to communicate our own ideas or views about a topic to others and know others' opinions about the same. But a meeting has a more controlled structure than a group discussion. The following components form the structure of a meeting:

- A chairperson
- An agenda
- A process for making decisions
- A well-managed discussion
- A productive physical set-up.

An agenda contains a list or an outline of the points to be discussed in the meeting. Based on the agenda a group discussion can serve as a decision making tool in a meeting. Keeping the agenda in their minds the participants of the meeting come prepared to attend it.

The agenda is normally geared by one person - the chairperson or the convener. In a meeting, unlike a group discussion, it is the chairperson who first takes up an issue and expresses his or her views about it. He or she also holds the responsibility to direct the procedures of the meeting and may allow a group discussion on the basis of the agenda.

A meeting also looks back at what had happened in the previous meeting by presenting the minutes. This is because the participants are required to reflect on the earlier issues in order to analyse and evolve a step to move forward in the present or future.

Voting is a prevalent way of expressing one's views in a meeting even as an open discussion is not always possible. A group discussion may form a part of the whole course of action in a meeting based on the agenda.

3.3.1 Agenda of a Meeting

The agenda is the most important component of any meeting. It gives the necessary details about the meeting: the time and place of the meeting, the names of the people who will attend it, the time when the meeting starts and ends, the issues to be discussed in the meeting, any preparation the attendees have to make for the meeting such as contacting people and collecting relevant information.

Meetings cannot be effective in fulfilling their objective(s) if the agenda is too large. A hidden agenda also makes meetings a waste of time. It results from personality clashes, private conflicts and discussing issues unrelated to the proposed agenda. It lies only in the chairperson's hands to handle such situations.

The agenda must consider the usefulness of a meeting. It should be formulated with an aim to:

- Giving depth to decisions
- Preventing mistakes
- Evolving diverse thinking
- Encouraging the attendees in decision-making

The agenda is usually presented by the secretary (to the chairperson of the group/committee) and approved by the chairperson.

3.3.2 Preparing for a Meeting

Remember the following things have to be done before you attend a meeting:

- 1) Carefully read the notice and understand the purpose of the meeting.
- 2) Decide what preparation is required: e.g. make necessary arrangements at your office while you will be in the meeting or notify the convener in advance if you cannot attend the meeting.
- 3) Prepare any materials or information that may be needed.
- 4) Prepare answers to any questions that may be asked.
- 5) Prepare a list of points that must be covered.
- 6) Prepare a list of questions that you want answered.

3.4 READING: ROLE OF PARTICIPANTS

Following are some important points which help to make a meeting meaningful and a useful resource to decision-making in a company.

Etiquette while Attending Meetings

Never be late for a meeting. If the meeting has already begun and you enter late the Chairman has to brief you on the earlier proceedings to help you participate in the meeting meaningfully. This not only disrupts the meeting but also is a

barrier in the continuity of the discussions. Arriving late is a sign of disrespect to the Chairperson and other members. Unless there is a very pressing reason or circumstances beyond your control, be punctual for meetings. Building up a reputation of punctuality at meetings will pay you in the long run.

Prepare Well for the Meeting

Before you have to attend a meeting, prepare yourself thoroughly. Go through the agenda carefully and acquaint yourself with the issues to be discussed. Collect information which you think may be useful for the meeting. Have an opinion or view on all the issues but do not be rigid. Be open to others' ideas and opinions. Don't get emotionally attached to your own ideas. If people oppose your views, try to understand why. Don't become rigid unless it is a matter of principle. You may be convinced that you are right and others are wrong but it generally doesn't happen that way.

Be a Good Listener

It is very important to be a good listener so as to respond to the views of the other participants and to articulate your own opinions. Do not have any preconceptions based on the speaker's age, race, cultural background, appearance or sex. Maintain eye contact with the speaker. Pay attention to his/ her ideas – the evidence and logic. Think of questions which you would like to ask later. Ask for clarifications if you don't understand something.

Don't Interrupt

Always allow a speaker to finish what s/he has to say. You may disagree with his/her views. Make notes and vocalize them once the speaker has finished. Even if the speaker is saying something irrelevant, it is prerogative of the Chairperson to intervene or interrupt. Frequent interruptions in meetings not only lead to waste of time but also put the meeting off track. Respect the rights and opinions of the other members.

Follow the Agenda

Always follow the agenda while speaking. Never try to bring up issues which are not listed on the agenda. Try to stay within the general limits of the goals of the meeting.

Be an Active Participant

Participate meaningfully in the meeting. You should speak when given a chance and if you have something to contribute to the issue being discussed. Speak courteously and cooperatively with others. Do not talk for the sake of talking. Analyze if what you are saying really contributes and facilitates the discussion. Cooperate both with the participants and the Chairperson to achieve the goals of the meeting. Contribute to both the subject of the meeting and smooth interactions among the participants. Always keep a pen and paper to note down any point which seems relevant or requires discussion in detail. This also gives



the impression to others that you are serious and respect the views of others. Ask pertinent questions whenever required.

Don't Monopolize the Meeting

Don't monopolize the meeting. Speak as briefly and as coherently as possible. Other members will appreciate you for this and listen to you seriously. Choose an appropriate time to voice your opinion. Use language which is courteous and control your tone. Emotional outbursts will hinder the progress of the meeting and also cause unpleasantness.

Resolve Conflicts

If any conflict arises in decision making, be a facilitator and a mediator to resolve the issue. Being accommodative and understanding are not signs of weakness but a sign of strength and maturity.

Pay attention to Non-verbal Communication

People may be nodding their heads while listening but their facial expressions otherwise don't indicate agreement or acceptance of a particular opinion. Try to resolve them. Some others may be distracted or may try to disrupt the meeting in a very subtle way. Such people should not be encouraged to do so. Try to engage everybody to participate in the meeting.

Maintain Meeting Decorum

Do not use your mobile phone while attending a meeting. Either put your phone on silent mode or if possible switch it off. Maintain order and discipline in the meeting heeding to the requests and instructions of the Chairpersons.

Finally, regardless of the type of meeting (information or decision making), it is important to close with a restatement of objectives, a summary of what was accomplished and a list of the actions to be taken. It is also important to follow up with action after the meeting. A brief memorandum of conclusions should be written and distributed. People who could not attend the meeting should also be informed about the essential decisions made. Finally each meeting should be viewed as a learning experience. Future meetings should be improved by asking for people's opinion and evaluations and deciding what action is required to conduct better meetings.

Check Your Progress 5

Answer the following questions briefly:

- 1) List two things which you have to do before attending a meeting.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

- 2) Why is it important to be a good listener at a meeting?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

- 3) How can you be an active participant in the meeting?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

- 4) What are some of the meeting etiquettes which you should follow while attending a meeting.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

- 5) How can you be a successful facilitator and mediator in a meeting?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

- 6) What is the appropriate language and tone while attending a meeting and why?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

- 7) List three recommendations on how a meeting should end.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

- 8) What according to you should happen after a meeting?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

3.5 VOCABULARY

Given below are some statements / phrases which are generally used during a discussion in a meeting.

Phrases for Disagreement

I am sorry, I don't agree with you.

Sorry, I'm not sure I agree with you.

I understand what you are saying but...

Don't you think it is just the opposite of ...

Actually, I think it is not what the issue is, but...

I'm sorry I can't agree with you

I'm not sure if I agree with you

I can see what you're saying, but...

Really? Do you think so?
Don't you think that...?
Actually...to be honest....

Phrases for Clarification

What exactly do you mean by...?
Could you be more specific about...?
Would you please clarify the...
Are you saying that...?

Handling Interruptions

Sorry, would you please allow me to...
May I finish first before...?
That's not the point I...
I'm sorry, you have misunderstood the...
Please allow me to complete the...

Referring to Other Speakers

As Mr. Singh has already discussed...
I'm sure Mrs. Kapoor would agree...
Later on Mr. Handu can give a report on...
I agree to Mrs. Heena's views on...

Diplomatic Phrases

There's a problem...
I think there may be a problem with that
There seems to be a small problem
Actually, that's not going to be easy...
I want to make a change in the agenda.
We can't do that.
Your estimate for the cost is too low.
The project is running late.
The transport costs are very high.
There's a misunderstanding.
There will be a delay.

Phrases for Making and Responding to Suggestions

**Group Discussions and
Meetings**

Perhaps you could...?

Why don't you...?

What about?

That's a good idea.

That could be worth trying.

What a great idea!

I'm not so sure about that.

I can see one or two problems there.

The different stages of a meeting can be summarized by the acronym – DESC

‘D’ – Describe situation

‘E’ – Express feelings/ opinions

‘S’ – Suggest solutions

‘C’ – Conclude with a decision

Check Your Progress 6

1) Which of these expressions would you use in the following situations?

- i) Preventing someone from interrupting

.....
.....

- ii) Stating your opinion

.....
.....

- iii) Asking to interrupt

.....
.....

- iv) Closing the meeting

.....
.....

- v) Asking for a clarification

.....
.....
.....

- vi) Inviting someone's opinion
.....
.....
- vii) Asking for comments
.....
.....
- viii) Moving on to the next point on the agenda
.....
.....

2) **Role Play:** Work with a friend or by yourself to complete these short dialogues. Take it in turns to read the first statement and to reply according to the instructions.

- | | | |
|------|---|--|
| i) | I think the report is too long. | (disagree strongly) |
| ii) | It's too late to make any changes. | (agree) |
| iii) | I feel we all need to work together. | (agree strongly) |
| iv) | In my opinion, we need to cut down expenses on entertainment. | (disagree) |
| v) | We must wait till next year to start this project. | (disagree, state the opposite opinion) |

3.6 LET US SUM UP

A group discussion is a very useful technique for fulfilling many purposes. It can form a part of a meeting, or form a part of the interview process. Based on the agenda, a group discussion can serve as a decision-making tool in a meeting. A group discussion can also be part of competitive examinations and job interviews.

Meetings are also an essential part of the workplace. To make a meeting meaningful an agenda is important. It is also important to prepare for a meeting before you attend it. There is a certain etiquette and language which is required for both group discussions and meetings. It is important to be aware of both if you want to be effective and successful in your diverse contexts.

3.7 ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) True and False:
- i) F (You must question but using language politely and skillfully)
 - ii) T
 - iii) F (You must say what you feel is true but use your language skillfully to sound polite and inoffensive.)

- iv) F (You must be flexible and change your views if evidence to the contrary is given.)
- v) T
- 2) Suitability of topics for group discussion (you can have your own opinions):
- i) **Higher Education:** A topic framed and worded like this is broad and vague and hence not suitable for group discussion.
 - ii) **Should we develop rural or urban areas in India?** This topic is worded as ‘either/or’ one and hence not suitable for group discussion.
 - iii) **Tourism:** This topic is framed simply in one word and hence the topic is vague and not suitable for GD.
 - iv) **How Can India Become self-sufficient in Energy Resources?** This is a suitable topic as it poses a predicament to the members and requires a joint enquiry for making a decision.
 - v) **Research in Health issues should be left to the private sector:** Such a topic is good for debate and not for discussion as people can speak either ‘for’ or ‘against’ the topic and may come up with pre-determined propositions and views.

Check Your Progress 2

These are sample answers, yours could be different:

- 1) **Generating ideas :** Deterioration in the standard of teaching, teachers need to be well paid to overcome financial constraints, continued supervision of teaching for the sake of the students, commercialization of education, closing the coaching centres will elevate the standard of education, age of competition — rat race, techniques to score more marks. Coaching institutes have better facilities than regular schools and colleges, high amounts of fee at coaching centres is a financial burden on parents, end result, difference between regular (academic) and competitive examinations, many students clear the competitive exam without attending any coaching, hard work and thorough preparation is the key, yet no guarantee of success.
- 2) Arranging points in order to arrive at one of the two conclusions
 - i) Coaching is necessary because:
 - The standard of teaching is deteriorating day by day.
 - Education has been commercialized and teachers tend to earn more through coaching institutions, they fail in their duties at schools and colleges.
 - It is an age of competition – to win in the rat race you need to know more than what is taught in regular institutions.
 - Coaching centres teach useful techniques to score more marks. e.g. time management.
 - Coaching institutes have better facilities than regular schools and colleges.

- End result is that those who attend coaching are more successful than those who don't.

- Coaching centres make one understand the difference between regular (academic) and competitive examinations.

ii) Coaching is not needed, because:

- If the coaching centres are closed it will elevate the standard of education.

- If the teachers are well paid they would not need an extra income.

- Example/Fact: Many students clear the competitive examinations without attending any coaching.

- Hard work and thorough preparation is the key and this can be encouraged in a normal classroom.

- Fee is very high in coaching centres.

- There is no guarantee of success. The good students anyway get through the exams but the coaching centres advertise their success as their own credit. Others fall in the way, lose money and repent after their failure.

3) **Beginning to speak:** Good morning friends. In my opinion coaching is necessary these days in order to prepare for academic studies and competitive exams. But I strongly believe that coaching for such purposes is not a recommendable practice. If certain things are changed to improve our educational standard, our students can become more capable and thorough in their subjects.

Check Your Progress 3

i) **Suman** took the lead by being the first speaker. She decided quickly and put her ideas into action. She spoke with a touch of reality and out of common experience.

ii) **Nirmal** was the second speaker. He was confident, logical and has convincing skills. He has a high vision and is optimistic. He spoke for a longer time than Suman without any intercession. He too has leadership qualities and is a good speaker.

iii) **Jeet** gave practical and acceptable points. His true examples focused the discussion on facts. However his discussion was average.

iv) **Rekha** spoke late, but she spoke well. She spoke justifiably and systematically. She has a mature style of speaking and was successful in discussing her ideas. She can be encouraged to take up leading roles.

v) **Bala** supported the idea that childcare is the responsibility of parents. But he was focusing on the responsibility of the children towards parents and exhibited a selfish attitude. He appeared to be unsympathetic.

- vi) **Suman** spoke twice (as the first and the sixth speaker) in the group which is impressive. Her discussion was logical and convincing. It can be concluded that she has leadership qualities.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) The topic for group discussion may have been: “Is child care the sole responsibility of parents?”
- 2) Among the 7 speakers, Koyel and Bhargav did not speak. They may have difficulty in generating ideas or in putting them forward, difficulty to start due lack of confidence or some other problem. Suman and Nirmal have good group communication skills. Rekha has also done reasonably well and can be recommended.

Check Your Progress 5

- 1) Before attending a meeting thorough preparation is required. Two steps to be taken are:
 - i) Go through the agenda carefully and acquaint yourself with the issues to be discussed.
 - ii) Collect information which you think may be useful for the meeting. Have an opinion or view on all the issues but do not be rigid. Be open to others' ideas and opinions.
- 2) It is very important to be a good listener so as to respond to the views of the other participants and to articulate your own opinions. Listening carefully will enable you to ask questions and clarifications about what you don't understand.
- 3) You can be an active participant by taking the following steps.
 - i) You should speak when given a chance and if you have something to contribute to the issue being discussed.
 - ii) Contribute to both the subject of the meeting and smooth interactions among the participants.
 - iii) Always keep a pen and paper to note down any point which seems relevant or requires discussion in detail. This also gives the impression to others that you are serious and respect the views of others.
 - iv) Ask pertinent questions whenever required.
- 4) Some of the meeting etiquette are listed below:
 - i) Never be late for a meeting. If the meeting has already begun then this will not only disrupt the meeting but also be a barrier in the continuity of the discussions. Arriving late is a sign of disrespect to the Chairperson and other members. Unless there is a very pressing reason or circumstances beyond your control, be punctual for meetings. Building up a reputation of punctuality at meetings will pay you in the long run.

- ii) Speak courteously and cooperatively with others. Do not talk for the sake of talking. Don't monopolize the meeting. Speak as briefly and as coherently as possible. Analyze if what you are saying really contributes and facilitates the discussion. Other members will appreciate you for this and listen to you seriously. Choose an appropriate time to voice your opinion.
 - iii) Use language which is courteous and control your tone. Emotional outbursts will hinder the progress of the meeting and also cause unpleasantness.
 - iv) Do not use your mobile phone while attending a meeting. Either put your phone on silent mode or if possible switch it off.
 - v) Maintain order and discipline in the meeting heeding to the requests and instructions of the Chairpersons. Cooperate both with the participants and the Chairperson to achieve the goals of the meeting.
- 5) i) If any conflict arises in decision making, be a facilitator and a mediator to resolve the issue. Being accommodative and understanding are not signs of weakness but a sign of strength and maturity.
- ii) Try to engage everybody to participate in the meeting.
- iii) Maintain order and discipline in the meeting heeding to the requests and instructions of the Chairpersons.
- 6) A courteous language and a controlled tone are most appropriate while attending a meeting. Emotional outbursts will hinder the progress of the meeting and also cause unpleasantness.
- 7) Regardless of the type of meeting (information or decision making), it is important to close it with the following:
- i) A restatement of objectives
 - ii) A summary of what was accomplished and
 - iii) A list of the actions to be taken
- 8) Once the meeting is over some of these steps should be taken.
- i) It is important to follow up with action after the meeting. A brief memorandum of conclusions should be written and distributed.
 - ii) People who could not attend the meeting should also be informed about the essential decisions made.
 - iii) Finally each meeting should be viewed as a learning experience. Future meetings should be improved by asking for people's opinion and evaluations and deciding what action is required to conduct better meetings.

Check Your Progress 6

- 1) i) **Preventing someone from interrupting** – Sorry, please let him finish.
- ii) **Stating your opinion** – In my view....., I believe.....

- iii) **Asking to interrupt** – If I may interrupt..., Sorry to interrupt, but.....
- iv) **Closing the meeting** – I think we've covered everything. That's it then. The next meeting will be held on Friday the 20th of June.
- v) **Asking for a clarification** – Excuse me, may I ask for a clarification on this?
- vi) **Inviting someone's opinion** – Could we hear from Puneet?... What do you think about?
- vii) **Asking for comments** – Any comments?
- viii) **Moving on to the next point on the agenda** – Let's move on to the next point..... Now we come to the question of.....

2) The sample reply is given in **bold**:

- i) I think the report is too long. (*disagree strongly*).
I wouldn't say that at all.
- ii) It's too late to make any changes. (*agree*)
I think you're right.
- iii) I feel we all need to work together. (*agree strongly*)
I couldn't agree more.
- iv) In my opinion, we need to cut down expenses on entertainment.
(*disagree*)
That's not how I see it.
- v) We must wait till next year to start this project. (*disagree, state the opposite opinion*)
That's out of the question. On the contrary, we should begin working on it as soon as we can.