

IIT Madras

BSc Degree

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English – I (Basic English)
Ms Sruthi Ranjani
Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras
Group Discussions

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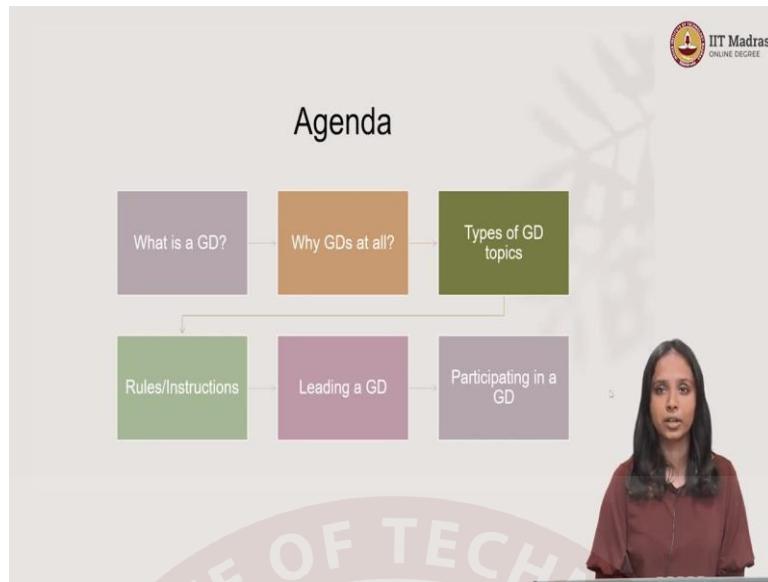
ENGLISH - I (BASIC ENGLISH)

Group Discussions



Welcome back, everyone, today's session will be about group discussions. Group discussions are usually an important part of the placement process in most technical and management institutes in India. So generally, the process starts with a resume shortlisting, then you go on to a group discussion and it ends with the interview being conducted in the final leg of the placement process. So, group discussions are quite an important part, they are sort of the middle step towards landing your dream job.

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So, we will discuss what group discussions are all about in this session and the agenda for this session is as follows. We will first talk about what a GD is, we will think about what the elements of a GD are, how it can be broken down, how we can understand, what it is, what the format is. Then we will take a look at and think about and ponder upon why we have juries at, all why GDs form an important part of job recruitment processes, and how group discussions can really help in other areas as well, such as market research and social science research.

Then we will talk about some types of very commonly asked GD topics in interviews and job recruitment scenarios. And we will break each of them down and think about some of the examples of each of those topics. Then we will move on to the actual format of a typical group discussion, we will look at the rules that are involved, all of these, we will look at under this pointer. And then finally, we will get to the point about how to lead a group discussion, we will also learn a little bit about how to participate in a group discussion. So, with the agenda being set, and with the overall goals for this session being set, let us begin.

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What is a group discussion?

GDs in job interviews
Testing interpersonal skills

FGDs in market/social sciences research

Let me invite you to think a little bit about what a group discussion can actually be. What do you think a group discussion is? In general, a group discussion is when a group of people usually 8 to 9 individuals come together to discuss a topic or a problem or a case and try to arrive at a solution or a consensus on the topic. In most cases, all these individuals are similarly qualified in terms of academic background, professional background be on the same page on the particular topic that they are discussing. So, that broadly is what a group discussion is.

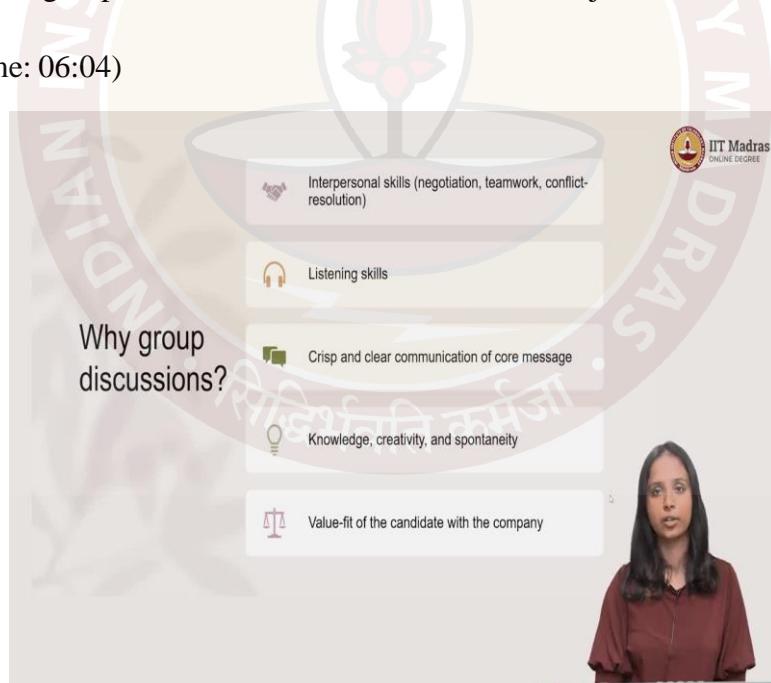
Now, GD's can be of two different types, GD's in job interviews, like the one that I have been talking about so far, the ones that are the stepping stone between the resume shortlisting, and the final interview, those are the most commonly conducted group discussions that are designed to test your interpersonal skills and your listening skills as well so that the company can get a gist of who you are as a person and based on that they may decide or decide not to hire you for the role that they have advertised.

So, those are the most commonly heard of GDs, but there are other kinds of group discussions as well, which are more specialized, more applicable in more niche scenarios and one of them is what we call a focus group discussion or an FGD. FGD is often used in market research and social sciences research. Say you have a product that you have designed and it is aimed at a particular set of consumers in the market, and you want to see if the product that you have designed is good enough or not, if it is working for all of them or not.

In such cases, you will bring together a set of people from different backgrounds, all these people are your potential consumers and you will give the product to them, conduct a discussion, ask them what their experiences the product have been, and from these conversations with them, glean some potential improvements to the product and glean whether you have been successful in designing the product, well for them or not. So that would be a typical situation in which a focus group discussion is used for market research purposes.

In social sciences research, say you have to design a new policy that benefits everyone, all these different stakeholders in a particular community, you would go to the community and gather a sample of people from different backgrounds, different genders, different socioeconomic backgrounds, different class backgrounds, and see exactly what the problem is and what they want to be resolved so that you get all perspectives from all different people, that is a focus group discussion that is used in social science research. Now, this is not something that we will discuss as part of this session, but nevertheless, it is good to know a little bit about how group discussions can be useful outside of job and recruitment scenarios.

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Having talked a little bit about what group discussions are and the different fields in which they can be applied? Let us now think about why we have group discussions, and specifically why we have them in recruitment scenarios? Well, the obvious first answer is that it is a way for the company or the employer that is conducting the recruitment process to test the interpersonal skills of the different candidates it has in its pool. Are the candidates equipped with good negotiation skills, good teamwork skills, are they equipped with conflict resolution

skills, so, these are the questions that they want answers to and group discussions are a very effective way for employers to realise who is a good fit for the role in the company, who is not.

Group discussions can also test your listening skills, group discussions are not always just about putting forth your point of view or putting forth your arguments they are more also about listening to others arguments, jotting down notes about what others are saying, synthesizing the different points of view that you can gather from the many different things that people are saying and that involves a lot of active listening. So, to be able to give a good response in a group discussion, active listening is also an important skill that you would need to have, and group discussions really help employers find out who has these kinds of good listening skills.

Group discussions are also a way for employers to realise which candidates have the ability to crisp and clearly communicate their core message as generally you will have only one minute to convey your response in the group discussion, there is not much time or space to do an elaborate speech on the topic at hand. So, the crispness and clarity with which you communicate your core message in a short amount of time is also an important skill that is tested in group discussions.

Knowledge, creativity and spontaneity, these are also again things that are tested in group discussions. Spontaneity, because you will not know the topic in advance, so you would need to be very spontaneous with your responses. Knowledge, because again, since you do not know the topic in advance you will need to have a vast background knowledge that you can draw from on the spot.

And creativity is also tested because you would need to make connections between different perspectives that people are giving and you will need to be creative in the way you present your answer. So, group discussions again are a very effective way to bring out the best of creativity, spontaneity and knowledge among potential candidates.

Value fit of the candidate with the company. Now, this might not be one of the more important points, but nevertheless, the kinds of positions you take the kind of answers you give the kinds of opinions you hold in group discussions also shed some light on what values you have as an individual and as a working professional.

And sometimes companies might also consider it important that they hire you people who share the same values as they do, so group discussions are in which there are controversial topics discussed, there are topics about values, culture, and ethics that are discussed and companies can glean a little bit about what kind of values you hold and what kind of positions you hold and whether you would be a good value fit in the company or not.

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Types of GD Topics

- General
 - Small businesses are an important lifeline of India's cities and need to be supported more.
 - India lives in the heart of its twenty-somethings.
- Argumentative/Debatable
 - Qualified professionals should look for opportunities in India, instead of migrating abroad.
 - A university education is not worth pursuing in India today.
- Abstract
 - Change is the only constant in existence.
 - The grass is always greener on the other side.

So, those are the reasons behind why group discussions form an important part of the recruitment process. let us look at a few types of different GD topics. There are usually general topics, topics that do not have two sides to them, topics that are not controversial, topics that generally are good to converse about, then make for good topics of discussion in the coffee table. So general topics are topics that do not really have a controversy embedded in them or topics that are not too philosophical or argumentative, they are generally topics of discussion that nevertheless have enough background to be rich conversation starters.

So, for instance, small businesses are an important lifeline of India cities and need to be supported more. India lives in the heart of its 20-somethings. These are topics that are not necessarily controversial, they do not have two sides to it and they do make for really good topics of discussion.

The second kind of topic and this is the most common kind of topic that is asked in group discussions are argumentative or debatable topics, topics that have some level of controversy embedded in them, some people might feel strongly for the statement that is made, while

some people might feel strongly against the statement that is made, so there are two sides to the topics.

So, for instance, qualified professionals should look for opportunities in India, instead of migrating abroad. Clearly, some people might fall in the category of people who say that people should migrate abroad for better work opportunities, whereas other people might fall in the category of people who think that “Indians qualified working professionals in India should stay on India and build the country up and contribute to the development efforts in the country”. So, there are clearly two different categories of opinions here.

Similarly, the second topic “a university education is not worth pursuing in India today”. Some people might say no university education is absolutely essential in India today, whereas others might say, university education is not really contributing much to the skill development of fresh graduates or teenagers in India, they should be spending their time doing things that are more vocational and more lucrative. So that is what an argumentative topic is about.

And finally, we have abstract topics, topics that lean towards the philosophical side of things, topics that spark conversations, but do not necessarily have a conclusive answer. So here are some examples changes the only constant in existence. The grass is always greener on his side, these are abstract statements that you can interpret in any manner you want. And here, there is a lot of room for a lot of creativity. So, such topics do not necessarily depend on your background knowledge is a crutch, they are more on the creative, abstract and philosophical side of things.

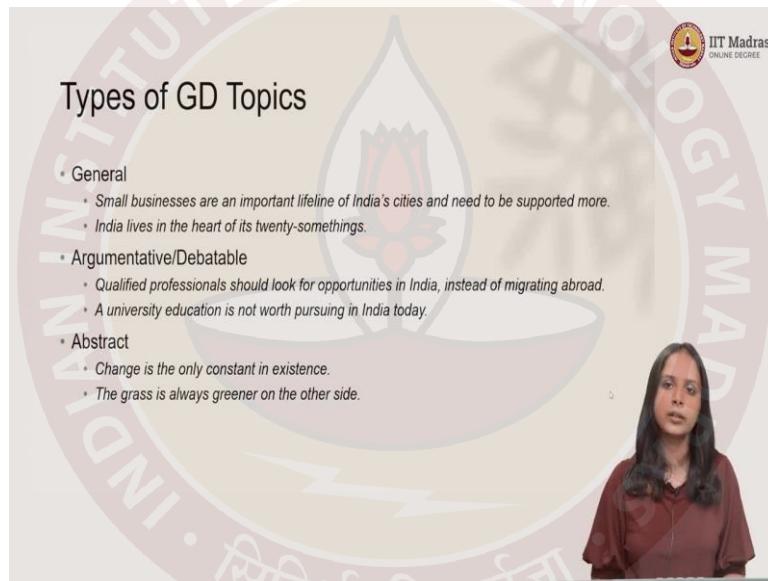
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The video thumbnail shows a woman with long dark hair, wearing a maroon top, speaking. The background is a light-colored wall. In the top right corner, there is the IIT Madras logo and the text "IIT Madras ONLINE DEGREE". A large, semi-transparent watermark of the IIT Madras seal is visible across the center of the image.

Types of GD Topics

- Caselets/Case-study based
 - You are the area manager of the Indian vertical of a world-famous USA-based content streaming platform. It has been three years since the firm has launched its operations in India; however, there are still not enough adapters in the local market. Upon consultation with your research team, you have concluded that 1) the content provided on the streaming service is not local enough to attract Indian consumers, and 2) the cost of the streaming service per month is too high and is not affordable for the average Indian consumer. What should the next course of action for the company be? How would you discuss this with your team members?



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Now that we have talked about three different types of GD topics, let us move on to the fourth and again, a very important kind of GD topic. Caselets or case-study based topics. Caselets are generally short versions of cases and the case is generally a problem, a real-life problem that needs to be solved, say in an organisation or in a country, these are real problems that are faced by real organisations, real governments, real institutions that need to be solved.

So, for instance, here is a caselets that we can take a look at. “You are the area manager of the Indian vertical of a world-famous USA based content streaming platform. It has been three years since the firm has launched its operations in India. However, there are not still enough adapters in the local market. Upon consultation with your research team, you have

concluded that 1) the content provided on the streaming service is not local enough to attract Indian consumers, and 2) the cost of the streaming service per month is too high and is not affordable for the average Indian consumer. What should the next course of action be for the company and how would you discuss this with your team members?"

So, here there is a very clear problem that needs to be solved in discussion in consultation with a team of different people from different backgrounds. So, it makes for a very good group discussion topic, because there is a problem that needs to be solved and you need to come to some sort of conclusion at the end of it, that to in discussion and in consultation and in dialogue with your other team member.

But one thing about cases that needs to be pointed out here is that they are generally micro level topics, like you have zoomed in very closely to a very particular problem that one company is facing in India, whereas with the previous topics that we discussed, they were all more general, they were all more on a macro level, these are all problems or issues that are on a macro level, more general.

