

GROUP DISCUSSION

Tips to conduct a Group Discussion



As the term itself suggests, a GD is a discussion. The prospect of a GD tends to leave most students petrified. You can get rid of that feeling of fear by remembering you have experienced group discussions right from childhood. Remember those heated discussions you had across the dinner table with family members, friends and relatives? Consciously or unconsciously, they have helped you learn a thing or two about discussing in a group.

The purpose of a GD, though conducted in a competitive mode, is not to establish you as a winner and others as losers. Its purpose, as far as you are concerned, is to help you come across as a person with sound, logical reasoning and the ability to respect another's viewpoint.

A critical difference between a GD and a debate is that, while a debate begins with two groups' bids to outwit each other, a discussion is evolutionary; this essentially means participants have the opportunity to refine their views in the course of the discussion. Thus, every member needs to contribute substantially and add to the existing knowledge base instead of pulling each other down.

The difference, thus, lies not just in style, but also in the mindset that is required to tackle either challenge.

Why institutes conduct a GD

How often have you called a friend in office to be told that he is in a meeting? Institutes conduct a GD because, as a manager, you will be required to attend and conduct innumerable meetings. A GD is a simulation of what you can expect in a meeting at your workplace.

Depending on the kind of profile you have and the company you work for, you will be part of meetings ranging from brand launches and employee performance appraisals to company financials, etc. For instance, if you have a meeting where senior employees are working out a strategy to launch a new soap in the market, this is what is expected of you before and during the meeting.

- ~ You will go well prepared for the meeting; this means you need to have sufficient information on the likely points of discussion.
- ~ During the meeting, you will let everyone have his say. When your turn comes, you will present your views forcefully and logically.
- ~ Whenever you disagree with somebody, you will present your points logically and make sure everybody understands what you have to say.
- ~ You will always attack points and not people.
- ~ You will carefully listen to other people's points and try to refine your own by using other people's inputs on the subject.

Project the same qualities during B-School admissions, where the purpose of the GD is to find out whether you possess the critical qualities needed to become an effective manager. While the written exam tests your comprehension and analytical skills, a GD tests you in the following:

- Body language
- Communication skills
- Self confidence
- Team skills
- Listening ability
- Ability to present your views logically
- Time management

A GD is a wonderful challenge because you have a maximum of 20 minutes to show if you have it in you to become an effective manager.

How to gear up for a GD

The CAT was only the first hurdle. The action now moves to another stage, another day.

~ The most important thing from now on till the time of the 20-minute GD challenge is to build your knowledge base. You must have done your daily dose of reading -- newspapers, magazines, etc -- even as you were preparing for CAT. Continue with your reading; add to it if necessary. Analyse issues from various angles.

~ Maintain a positive attitude. Stay motivated and excited about the upcoming challenge.

The Group Discussion and Personal Interview stage is also the most decisive one; a bad performance here can undo all the good work you put in CAT. So, continue to stay focused and competitive.

~ One of the most critical challenges of coming across as a good participant in a discussion is to have the ability to see things from the other person's viewpoint and respect it even if you strongly disagree.

Practice make perfect

~ As part of your preparation, you must participate in a few mock GDs. Run through these performances later, identify your areas of strength and areas for improvement and work on them consciously.

~ Success in a GD also depends on outgrowing old habits like indulging in small talk with a group of friends. Whenever you have a gathering of sorts, try not to indulge in loose talk. Focus on discussing a topic of current relevance. Thus, an informal gathering of friends can be converted into a GD practice session.

~ Whenever you come across fellow MBA aspirants, don't look upon them as competitors. Treat them as contributors to your success. You can share each other's strengths and thus overcoming your weakness. It makes a lot of sense for fellow MBA aspirants to get together and conduct mock GDs on various topics. This run-up to the actual GD should be a symbiotic effort rather than a parasitic one.

After each discussion, you must, as a group, analyse one another individually and suggest areas for improvement. This way, you will also get exposed to your fellow aspirants' perspectives and broaden your thought process.

The skills you develop to ace your GD will prove to be an asset even after you begin your professional career.

5 Steps! How to Face GD

A group discussion consists of:

1. Communication Skills
2. Knowledge and ideas regarding a given subject
3. Capability to co-ordinate and lead
4. Exchange of thoughts
5. Thorough preparations

1. Communication Skills

The first aspect is one's power of expression. In a group discussion, a candidate has to talk effectively so that, he/she is able to convince others. For convincing, one has to speak forcefully and at the same time create an impact by his knowledge of the subject. A candidate who is successful in holding the attention of the audience creates a positive impact.

It is necessary that you should be precise and clear. As a rule evaluators do not look for the wordage produced. Your knowledge on a given subject, your precision and clarity of thought are the things that are evaluated. Irrelevant talks lead you nowhere. You should speak as much as necessary, neither more nor less. Group discussions are not debating stages. Ability to listen is also what evaluator's judge. They look for your ability to react on what other participants say. Hence, it is necessary that you listen carefully to others and then react or proceed to add some more points. Your behavior in the group is also put to test to judge whether you are a loner or can work in a group.

You should be able to convey your thoughts satisfactorily and convincingly before a group of people. Confidence and level headedness in doing so is necessary. These add value to your presentation. In case you are not good at it, you might gain by joining an institute that offers specialized courses in public speaking. For instance, British Council Division's English Language Teaching Centre offers a wide range of courses like conversation skills, business communication skills, business writing, negotiation skills and presentation skills. Mostly people attend these courses to improve their communication skills. Students here are involved in activities which use communication skills and teachers provide inputs, monitor and facilitate the classes. The course at the Centre makes you confident enough to speak before people without any nervousness.

2. Knowledge and Ideas Regarding a Given Subject

Knowledge of the subject under discussion and clarity of ideas are important. Knowledge comes from consistent reading on various topics ranging from science and technology to politics. In-depth knowledge makes one confident and enthusiastic and this in turn, makes one sound convincing and confident.

3. Leadership and Coordinating Capabilities

Basic aim of a group discussion is to judge a candidate's leadership qualities. The examiner withdraws and becomes a silent spectator once the discussion starts. A candidate should display tactfulness, skill, understanding and knowledge on varied topics, enterprise, forcefulness and other leadership qualities to motivate and influence other candidates who may be almost equally competent.

4. Exchange of Thoughts

Group discussion is an exchange of thoughts and ideas among members of a group. These discussions are held for selecting personnel in organizations where there is a high level of competition. The number of participants in a group can vary between 8 and 15. Mostly a topic or a situation is given to group members who have to discuss it within 10 to 20 minutes.

The purpose is to get an idea about candidates in a short time and make assessments about their skills, which normally cannot be evaluated in an interview. These skills may be team membership, leadership skills, listening and articulation skills. A note is made of your contributions to the discussion, comprehension of the main idea, the rapport you strike, patience, assertion, accommodation, amenability, etc. Body language and eye contact too are important points which are to be considered.

5. Thorough Preparations

Start making preparations for interview and group discussions right away, without waiting till the eleventh hour, this is, if and when called for them. Then the time left may not be adequate. It is important to concentrate on subject knowledge and general awareness. Hence, the prime need for thorough preparation. It may so happen that you are called for interviews and group

discussions from three or four organizations but are not selected by any. The reason obviously lies in your not being well-prepared.

In a group discussion you may be given a topic and asked to express your views on it. Or in a case study GD, students have to read a case study and suggest ways of tackling the problem. For this you should have a good general knowledge, need to be abreast with current affairs, should regularly read newspapers and magazines. Your group behavior and communication skills are on test, i.e. how you convince the others and how clearly you are able to express your points of view. You should be articulate, generate ideas, not sound boring, should allow others to speak, and adopt a stand on a given subject. During the course of the GD this stand can even be changed, giving the impression that you are open to accommodate others' viewpoints. Additional marks may be given for starting or concluding the discussion.

Points to Remember

- ☐ Knowledge is strength. A candidate with good reading habits has more chances of success. In other words sound Knowledge on different topics like politics, finance, economy, science and technology is helpful.
- ☐ Power to convince effectively is another quality that makes you stand out among others.
- ☐ Clarity in speech and expression is yet another essential quality.
- ☐ If you are not sure about the topic of discussion, it is better not to initiate. Lack of knowledge or wrong approach creates a bad impression. Instead, you might adopt the wait and watch attitude. Listen attentively to others, may be you would be able to come up with a point or two later.
- ☐ A GD is a formal occasion where slang is to be avoided.
- ☐ A GD is not a debating stage. Participants should confine themselves to expressing their viewpoints. In the second part of the discussion candidates can exercise their choice in agreeing, disagreeing or remaining neutral.
- ☐ Language use should be simple, direct and straight forward.
- ☐ Don't interrupt a speaker when the session is on. Try to score by increasing your size, not by cutting others short.
- ☐ Maintain rapport with fellow participants. Eye contact plays a major role. Non-verbal gestures, such as listening intently or nodding while appreciating someone's viewpoint speak of you positively.
- ☐ Communicate with each and every candidate present. While speaking don't keep looking at a single member. Address the entire group in such a way that everyone feels you are speaking to him or her.

Tips to Prepare for Group Discussions

Group discussion is a new trend that has come up in order to evaluate student personality. A group of participants are made to discuss on a topic or subject for a limited time and then assessed accordingly. It is a chance for you to be more vocal.

There are a lot of advantages of a group discussion:

- ☐ It helps to shed away the shyness of a candidate and brings his viewpoint amidst all.
- ☐ It stimulates to think in a different, new way.
- ☐ It helps the candidate in understanding his/ her own strengths and weaknesses.
- ☐ It acts as an aid in expansion of the knowledge of the participant.
- ☐ It helps to analyze the social or economic issues more logically.
- ☐

Not just these, there are various other advantages to add on to. But, let us first have a glimpse of how to perform well in a group discussion.

Here is a list of what should be done and what should be avoided at a Group Discussion (GD)

- 1) Be as natural as possible. Do not try to be someone you are not. Be yourself. In an attempt to be someone else, your opinions will not be portrayed.
- 2) Sit with a straight and confident posture.
- 3) Be assertive yet humble. You need to stick to your values and beliefs, but learn to respect the values and opinions of others too.
- 4) Grab the opportunity to speak first, i.e. to start the group discussion with your opinion. It generally leaves a good impression on the evaluator, but take the move only if you have complete knowledge of the subject.
- 5) Do not repeat a point, or be lengthy or irrelevant. Also intervene, if someone else is going on an irrelevant track.
- 6) Facilitate contribution from others. Do not just go on and on and on with only your opinionated view. Remember, it is a group discussion. Allow others to speak too.
- 7) Make an eye contact with all the participants. It creates more room for conversation. Also keep nodding, when others speak, it shows receptivity.
- 8) Be an active and dynamic participant. The examiner wants to hear you speak. So do put forth your views.
- 9) Be positive and prepare your thoughts well but do not be over-confident.
- 10) Think well before you speak. You are being heard and judged upon.
- 11) When raising an objection to a point kept by another speaker, back it up with a solid reason to get the point across.

12) Use quotes, facts and figures, statements, everyday life examples to express a clear chain of thoughts. Also it might leave a good impression on the examiner and help you score well.
These are some basic yet very vital tips that will help you feel a bit more confident about yourself and make you ready to appear for that group discussion trend.

INTERVIEW

Tips for a Successful Interview



Quick Facts...

- To make a good impression at an interview: Do your research, rehearse and then relax.
- Practice ahead of time with sample questions and different interview styles.
- During the interview, be tactful, courteous, sincere, polite and knowledgeable about the organization and what you have to offer it.
- Always send a follow-up thank you letter to the interviewer.

You've just applied for college admission, a major award or a new job. You have been invited to come in for an interview next week. Your resume, cover letter and good use of networking contacts have brought you this far. Now do your research, rehearse and relax. If you've had interview experience through 4-H youth development or school, you're ahead of the game. Here are some tips to help you make a good impression.

Interview Preparation

Do Your Homework

Learn as much as you can about the opportunity and the interviewing organization. Evaluate your own knowledge, skills and abilities and think about how you qualify for the opportunity. Find out information about the organization ahead of time.

General Questions

- What is the name of the interviewer(s)?
- Where will your interview be conducted? When and for how long?

College or University

- Is it public or private? State or municipal? Land grant? What majors are the most popular? How many students attend? Can you study online?
- Do you know any students who attend? If so, ask them how they like going there.
- What is the rate of admission? Of graduation? What scores do students usually need for acceptance? What is the rate of employment upon graduation in your field or area of interest?
- What are the expectations? Do you need to have a laptop when you arrive? Will you be traveling during breaks?

Award

- Is this award given every year? How is it funded? How many winners will be selected?
- Do you know any previous winners? If so, talk to them about their experience as an award winner.
- What are the criteria and qualifications for selection? Do they offer other awards similar to this one for which you might apply?
- What are the expectations? Will you be writing a report or making a presentation about your experience as the winner?

Employment

- How long have they been in business? What goods or services do they provide? How many employees do they have?
- Do you know any people who currently work there? If so, ask them how they like working there.
- What will the responsibilities be? What skills and knowledge will you need to do this job? Are their opportunities for increased responsibility or advancement?
- What are the expectations? Is this a full-time or a part-time job? Is the schedule flexible and will it fit your other responsibilities?

Interview styles

Be prepared for a variety of interview styles. Some interviewers simply ask questions from a list, some use a conversational style, and others may just say something like, "Tell me about yourself and why you want this opportunity." You may be asked to give a graphic representation of yourself in words or symbols on a chalkboard or flip chart. You could use one or more of the following types of visual aids: bar graph, freehand drawing, pyramid steps or resume outline.

Appearance

Plan how you will look. Don't try a new haircut or style, but do get a haircut about a week before your interview. Makeup and jewelry, if worn, should be moderate. Dress conservatively and comfortably, about one level above what you would wear to work. Being clean and neat is most important. Plan ahead so that you don't have to scramble at the last minute about what to wear. Have a backup outfit ready just in case. No denim and no backpack.

Practice, Practice, Practice

Practice answering questions. List your skills, talents and experiences that directly apply to this opportunity, as well as any hobbies that relate to it, so you can tell the interviewer(s) about what you can do.

Plan and practice some answers to typical questions. Practice in front of a mirror, or record your practice interviews on an audio- or videotape. Watch for nervous gestures and eliminate any slang or other inappropriate language. You will be expected to speak in the language of work and school. Enlist the help of others to ask you questions and evaluate your answers and presentation. Look on the Internet for sites with practice interview sessions.

What are some of the biggest job interview mistakes?

1. The number one biggest job interview mistake is to fail to research the company for which you're interviewing. It may seem obvious, but many people just don't do their homework and find out about the

company for which they hope to work. For example, have you gone to the company's website if they have one? Do you know the CEO's name, the stock ticker symbol (if applicable), and the names of their biggest competitors? Failure to be prepared with knowledge of the company shows disinterest to the interviewer. Make sure you know as much as you can about the company before stepping foot in the interview room.

2. Dressing inappropriately for the interview. Notice the word "inappropriately," which can imply under-dressed as well as over-dressed. For example, casual clothes are inappropriate for a corporate job. A suit and tie can be inappropriate for a creative job or laid-back company. The more you know about the company, the more you know what appropriate and inappropriate clothing is to that company.
3. Not knowing why you're there. Be clear you know exactly for what position you're interviewing. It's not a job you're interviewing for, it's a position, a need you're fulfilling for the company. How can you convey the fact you're right for the position if you're not really clear on what it is?
4. Not being rested. If you've partied the night before, are lacking sleep, and didn't give yourself adequate time to prepare for the interview, it shows. Make sure you get plenty of sleep and your clothes are pressed and ready. In addition, make sure you've eaten something before the interview.
5. Not knowing how to physically get to the interview. Many people make the mistake of neglecting to find out exactly where the interview is being held and how to get there. Go to MapQuest or look at a paper map, but make sure you know how to get to the building. You might want to drive the route the night before so you'll know where to park and how far the building is from the parking lot. If you end up late to your interview because you didn't know how long the drive would take, or exactly which route to follow, you've already lost the interview before stepping in the room.
6. Not defining your strengths. Leave a positive impression with the interviewer about what benefit they would receive by hiring you. This is where you really have to market yourself and let the interviewer know what you can do for them. You have to let the company know what sets you apart from all the other applicants.
7. Not asking questions. When the interviewer asks you at the end of the interview if you have any questions for them, are you prepared with 3-4 intelligent questions, or do you just smile and say, "not really." Interviewers like it that you ask questions. But, make them questions that show your interest in the company. Steer away from questions like "and how many vacation days do I get again?"
8. Trying too hard. It's tricky, but the real key is to just be yourself and don't try too hard to be liked. You know people who try too hard - they laugh at all your jokes, even when they're not jokes; they show fake enthusiasm and they overly agree with everything you say. Don't be that person. Be you.
9. Not listening. Don't let your mind wander in the interview, stay focused on what is being said. Don't miss the current question by trying to anticipate the next one. And, don't get carried away by your internal critic who's critiquing everything you're doing. If you make a mistake, don't focus on the criticism in your head, but, rather, focus on what the interviewer is talking about.
10. Criticizing your former boss. Above all, don't dish the dirt about your current or former employment. Be graceful about any disagreement you are having or have had with your former boss. If you start criticizing former employers, the interviewer might think you might do the same regarding your employment with them someday.

Greatest Weakness

Vocabulary

Non-traditional background: For job applicants or applicants to university, this describes having a personal history that is different from normal, for example by being older than other applicants, by having children when most others don't, or being handicapped, etc. "Actually our company encourages applicants from nontraditional backgrounds."

To make sacrifices: To give up something, usually in order to achieve a larger goal. "I've had to make a lot of sacrifices to be so successful in my career."

To work part-time: In contrast with working full-time, which usually means working 40 hours a week or more, working “part-time” means only working a limited number of hours, usually without the benefits of a regular job. “I work part-time in the evenings in addition to my regular job in order to make a little extra money.”

(To go to) night school: Night school usually describes a special program of a college or professional school that targets adult learners who have to work during the day. “I got certified as a software engineer by going to night school every day after work.”

To have an impact on s/o or sth.: This means to have a big influence someone or something. Impact can refer to a positive influence, but it usually refers to a negative one. “My injury had a huge impact on my performance.”

To give one an edge over s/o: To give someone a competitive advantage over someone. “My foreign language skills give me an edge over many applicants.”

Sense of responsibility: A feeling of being responsible for someone or something that includes a desire to do one’s duty. “One of the reasons she does such excellent work is her enormous sense of responsibility.”

Time management skills: The ability to deal with a very busy schedule by planning carefully to get everything done. “Gene’s excellent time management skills are the key to his success.”

Mature: Literally, grown-up. When describing adults, it means experienced and emotionally balanced. The noun form is “maturity.” “Even though he’s fairly young, Charles is a very mature guy.”

Strong contributor: To contribute to something means to give to something, and usually has a strong positive sense. Contributor is a person who contributes. In a workplace, a strong contributor is someone who contributes a lot to the success of the company. “When you look at sales performance, Stephanie is definitely one of our strongest contributors.”

Work environment: This refers to the general atmosphere or “feeling” in an office, i.e., Is it tense? Relaxed? Quiet? Noisy? “An excellent work environment is essential to good productivity.”