

What is a Group Discussion?

"Group" is a collection of individuals who have regular contact and frequent interaction and who work together to achieve a common set of goals. "Discussion" is the process whereby two or more people exchange information or ideas in a face-to-face situation to achieve a goal. The goal, or end product, maybe increased knowledge, agreement leading to action, disagreement leading to competition or resolution or perhaps only a clearing of the air or a continuation of the status-quo.

Who holds a Group Discussion?

"Group Discussion", popularly labelled as GD, is a popular methodology used by many organizations (company, institute, business school, etc.) these days to gauge whether the candidate has certain personality traits such as interpersonal communication skills, confidence in public speaking, team spirit, leadership abilities, social behaviour and problem-solving skills. GDs form an important part of the short-listing process for recruitment or admission in a company or institution.

How is a GD Conducted?

The group of candidates is given a topic or a situation which could be either factual, abstract or case based, and typically given some time to think and make notes about the same. After this, the group of candidates is, and then asked to discuss the topic among themselves for a specific duration ranging between 10-40 minutes (which may vary from one organization to another). While the group discusses the pertaining issue at hand, the Moderators/ Panellists silently observe each candidate on various pre-determined parameters. The Panellists assign scores to every candidate based on his/her individual performance as well as how he performed within the group.

As in a football game, where you play like a team, passing the ball to each team member and aim for a common goal, GD is also based on teamwork, incorporating views of different team members to reach a common goal. So, a group discussion refers to a communicative situation that allows its participants to share their views and opinions with other participants. It is a systematic exchange of information, views and opinions about a topic, problem, issue or situation among the members of a group who share some common objectives.

Why is a "GD" conducted?

Over the recent years, Group Discussion became a popular method of assessing a candidate's soft skills. The contenders who are shortlisted on basis of written exams have qualified with their intelligence quotient, i.e., aptitude and knowledge. However, since the significance of emotional quotient arose, new tools such as GDs were devised to gauge candidates' social and interpersonal skills. Organizations conduct GDs to find out whether you possess the critical qualities/skills to contribute effectively to the goal accomplishment process.

Why GD is important?

- It helps evaluate whether a candidate is the right fit for the organisation.
- It helps assess how a participant performs under different situations in a group.
- It helps to judge how one conceptualizes and manoeuvres his ideas through the discussion.
- It helps in analysing the candidate's attitude towards fellow members through one's communication and interpersonal skills, listening ability, humility and tolerance to others ideas.
- It helps in shedding light on candidate's leadership and managerial skills, problem-solving aptitude, creative thinking and knowledge on diverse topics.

Since, team work is an essential element of corporate work-sphere, a person's ability to perform well in a GD is very critical for a successful career. A GD helps to achieve group goals as well as individual goals. The examiner can evaluate both the personality traits and group skills of candidates participating in a G.D. It is basically a situation test wherein a sample of a candidate's group worthiness and potential as a worker comes out quite explicitly.

What are the different types of topics in a Group Discussion?

A Group Discussion may be based on two kinds of topics:

- **Factual:** Such topics require familiarity with facts/information on static/dynamic components of the environment (such as social, political, economic, etc.). These topics can be further categorized into the following:
 - **Factual Generic** - These topics require a basic level of awareness with respect to the various segments of our environment. They test you more on interpersonal skills, behaviour and your ability to generate points, rather than discrete sectoral information. Examples:
 - Cricket and India
 - Issues of managing diversity in a country like India
 - Honesty is the best policy
 - Living in a joint family is better
 - Guessing is an act of intelligence
 - **Factual Specific** - These topics assess you on specific challenges in gathering and analysing information on select areas. A thorough understanding of current affairs can ensure a high comfort level in handling such topics. Examples:
 - Covid 19 and its social and economic impact
 - WTO and its impact on the Indian Economy
 - The Jasmine revolution and implications for the Arab world
 - GAAR
 - The Euro crisis: issues and challenges

- Abstract: Such topics are based on your perception. The way you look at the topic decides your subsequent participation and performance. The challenge here is to put forth multiple implications of the topic and then evoke a discussion on some of them. Idea generation and ability to add a tangible angle to an otherwise abstract topic are the hallmarks of success here. Examples:
 - Pigs can fly
 - And the clock struck 13!
 - Pink pyjamas over the Red Fort
 - Red is red, blue is blue and never the two shall meet
 - Black

Tips for starting a GD

- Well begun is half done: This age-old adage is convincingly verified in the opening part of the GD. If you start on a good note and are able to impart the right direction to the group, it places you on a comfortable pedestal. It builds the right momentum for the entire group and earns you the tag of a leader.
- High risk high return situation: Starting the discussion is a powerful role to play in a GD. It imparts directional inputs to the group members and demonstrates your initiative. However, the downside attached to it is also quite intimidating; you may start the discussion assuming it would enable you to leverage the potential benefits, hoping that other members would join in. But sample a possibility when nobody else pitches in and you alone have to hold the fort – it puts you in an embarrassing position!
- Projects goal setting ability: The first speaker showcases an ability to set the goal for the subsequent discussion. This is even more true in case of an abstract topic, where the foremost challenge is to decode the topic in multiple ways and identify a tangible path for discussion.
- Demonstrates high initiative: Being the first speaker is reflective of your ability to take the first step in the right direction, and indicates clarity of thought and high confidence levels.
- Use Key Word Approach
 - Identify the key words in the topic: Identifying the key words in the topic serves as a good strategy as it helps you to start in an easy yet sequential manner. For example, if the topic for discussion is 'Is guessing an act of intelligence?', then applying the key word approach helps you to identify 'guessing' and 'intelligence' as the key words in the given topic.
 - Define the key words: Having identified the key words, the next challenge is to define these words in a simple and empirical manner. In the above

example, this will entail a quick definition of the words 'guessing' and 'intelligence', which is not a very difficult task!

- Correlate the key words to pan out the scope of the topic for discussion: This step requires you to bind the key words in a meaningful and progressive way, enabling you to pan out a flowchart for the ensuing discussion.
- Apply Shock Strategy
 - Shock and un-shock the group: People love to be taken aback; they value surprises! This approach propounds the need for doing something unpredictable to spell bound the group and then helping them to wriggle out of the surprise spell. If handled well, it will create an awe factor for you to ride on!
 - Shock can be created in different ways: -
 - Share a story: Stories are a powerful way of putting across your point of view. It also serves as an anchor during the critical opening part of the discussion. You are advised to be familiar with a variety of stories which can be quickly plugged in to suit the occasion. Motivational stories find a particular use here.
 - Use quotes: Quoting what someone said once upon a time, may be of significant help to build the opening pitch for the discussion. It is conducive in building up the momentum for the occasion.
 - Wield data: Stating relevant facts at the beginning of the discussion is a convincing way of impacting people and making them value your point of view. It adds authenticity to your content.
- Follow Patenting Approach
 - Patent is a legal right: The first speaker takes it all! If you can think quickly and creatively, this strategy works for you. It is particularly useful where the topic is abstract and offers multiple opportunities for a lateral treatment.
 - Use divergent thinking to come out with as many implications of the topic as possible: Look at the topic in an unorthodox manner and try coming out with diverse implications thereof. As the first speaker pan out the various dimensions of the topic and then invite the group for a discussion on one or more of these.
 - Depends on the given topic; factual topics may not offer as much flexibility for divergent thinking: This strategy may not be applicable to every topic. For example, an abstract topic is likely to offer more patenting opportunities as compared to a factual one!
 - Be fluent enough to exercise this approach: The success of this approach depends on the pace by which you can communicate multiple ideas, and hence fluency is a great facilitator in this approach.
- Avoid the following:

- Repeating the topic at the onset: Repeating the topic is an indication of your need to buy more time to think. It is advised that you should not indulge in such a redundant technique.
- Speaking for the sake of speaking: This is a superficial way of participating and both the panel and the group will realize the lack of content in your speech.
- Taking an affirmative stand at the very beginning: It is suggested that you should not begin with a verdict/opinion. The idea is to evolve by means of a discussion and not be seen as an opinionated/judgmental person who is dampening the spirits of other participants.
- Getting into a conflict with a parallel speaker: Getting into an undesirable conflict without any logic, may be of detrimental consequences. However, it should not hold you from constructive arguments.

15 Do's in a GD:

- Make sure your first entry is well planned. The first impression goes a long way in establishing your credentials. Enter the discussion with a strategy, rather than a random input.
- If you are the first speaker understand the difference between starting and initiating the discussion. Initiating is about imparting an overall direction to the discussion and panning out an agenda for the group. Starting is merely speaking for the sake of speaking.
- Establish eye contact with the key participants, but do not ignore the other participants. While the active participants need to be acknowledged more frequently, the passive ones should not be completely overlooked. You may follow Pareto's 80-20 rule here, with 80% of the attention being given to the key participants and the balance 20% being given to the other lot.
- Use a strong voice, clear diction and correct grammar. This gives you an operational advantage.
- Try getting as many likes as possible. Eventually the discussion boils down to group dynamics and collaboration. Creating likeability may help you to navigate more effectively through the course of the discussion. However, this doesn't imply lack of constructive arguments wherever required.
- Do take counter arguments gracefully and display good listening skills, projecting you as a good learner.
- Do acknowledge the previous speaker before putting across your point of view. Discussion implies an action-reaction interface. Not reacting to the preceding input may show your inability to do so.
- Do support your viewpoint with examples and facts. These will add conviction to your point of view and corroborate your stand.

- Do demonstrate an ability to look at a topic from multiple dimensions. This reflects your ability to think laterally and treat the topic in a more mature and wholesome manner.
- Do try to understand the right exit points. Please appreciate that the challenge is not to hold the main-stage all through, but to add value at appropriate points of the discussion. Your exit strategy is as crucial as the entry strategy.
- Do recapitulate the main points of the discussion when required. This helps you to consolidate the flow of the discussion at critical points and also demonstrates your ability to assimilate the view points of others.
- Do present yourself as a team player with an ability to balance individual excellence and group performance. The group discussion is not just about your perspective; you have to respond to the others' perspectives as well and enlarge the scope of the discussion.
- Address group members with respect and dignity. This shows professional courtesy and etiquettes.
- When asked to conclude, summarize the main points of discussion. The conclusion is not about what you feel about the topic; it is about what the group felt as a whole. This needs reference to the main points which emanated in that span and the overall stand of the group.
- Maintain a calm and balanced disposition throughout the discussion. This demonstrates your ability to manage stress effectively.

15 Don'ts in a GD

- Go through the list of things to avoid so as to crack a GD:
- Don't start for the sake of starting. This may project you as an impulsive person with lack of planning and organizing skills, which totally discounts your candidature for a management program.
- Don't speak randomly without a plan and structure. This may give an impression to the panel that you are speaking and not adding any value to the discussion.
- Don't be arrogant, overaggressive or vain. This may evince a negative attitude with poor interpersonal skills.
- Don't show a lack of attention or energy. This may show that you are indifferent to the task at hand. Kindly appreciate that energy is the capacity for doing work and any compromise on adequate energy levels will portray you as someone who is not task driven.
- Don't look at only the key speakers in the discussion. It is your responsibility to respect all members of the group. The key speakers should definitely be given more attention, but this should not imply that the passive speakers are totally neglected.
- Don't condemn or severely criticize anyone's view point. Everyone has a right to his/her opinion. It is possible that some members of the group get aggressive

while expressing themselves but they need to be managed in a certain other way.

- Don't indulge in cross discussions when the main discussion is in progress. This amounts to transgression and does not conform with formal etiquettes.
- Don't form cartels to visibly monopolize the discussion. This is seen as an act of violating the essence of an open, natural discussion. This also projects you as a person vying for undue control/power.
- Don't get restless and jittery when someone counters your point. It is natural that in a discussion your point gets contradicted. You are supposed to respond with facts/examples/illustrations/logic.
- Don't get into unnecessary arguments or futile conflicts with other speakers. This will only add to the opportunity cost.
- Don't look at the panel while making a point. This may project you as an attention seeker and an insecure person.
- Don't fold your arms or cross your legs to slip into an over casual posture. It is a formal occasion and you cannot portray an informal/casual appearance/attitude.
- Don't enter your neighbour's private space while making a point. This is a violation of his/her intimate space and will be seen as a breach of a code of conduct.
- Don't over gesticulate. This may project you as an impulsive person.
- Don't scream and shout to prove your point as it negates the importance of poise and composure.

GD FAQs

1. Does the use of certain words affect one's performance in a Group Discussion?

- Filler Words: Within our own language we need to remove the filler words. These words give us time to think, but these words de-emphasize what we are trying to say. Inappropriately used, they rob our speech of the power of persuasion. These phrases include.
 - Um...
 - Sort of...
 - Type of ...
 - Well, you know...
 - You know what I mean...
- Link Words: There are times when people want to soften the impact of what they want to say and they start with a seemingly incidental and important piece of information and then use a link word or expression before they say what they really mean. If you watch out of these, you will know how to focus on what someone is really trying to communicate
 - By the way...

- But...
- However...
- Incidentally...
- On the other hand...
- **Emphatic Words:** Words that can be used to emphasize the ideas that follow them:
 - Definitely
 - Honestly
 - Must
 - Actually
 - Frankly
 - Literally

2. My spoken English is poor and GDs are just round the corner. Is there any quick-fix solution to maximize my chances?

What is important is "effectiveness" rather than the ability to speak fluently or use big words. For example, if someone uses grammatically incorrect English but is still able to express a good idea, this is still accepted. Similarly, people who deliver their points effectively using simple language are appreciated when compared to those who do the same with complex constructs. You can practice some simple statements like the following:

- To give your opinion/ agree with an opinion
 - "I think we should"
 - "I think the correct approach is to"
 - "I am in agreement with what has just been said."
 - "I would like to add the following"
- To disagree
 - "I don't agree with the idea that"
 - "I differ on this issue. I think we should"
 - "May be we should consider the following....."
 - "I feel we should do/ should not do this...."
- To seek clarification
 - "Could you please restate what you just said?"
 - "I did not understand you. Can you please repeat?"

Apart from the above, you can try the following:

- Practice speaking out loud whatever thoughts cross your mind on a subject, to overcome your inhibition.
 - Practice reading out loud from books and newspapers.
 - Watch news on popular English news channels.
 - Form groups with others and speak in English as much as possible.
- 3. Should I take down notes of the GD? Is it important to remember what points are being raised or to think of new issues?**

It is important to remember the issues raised and the important points made - you will need this both to summarize as well as identify how you could contribute more points to the discussion. One way to remember the issues is to take notes of the discussion. However, rather than writing down verbatim or long sentences, just jot down the key words (carry a small pad to the GD). Actually, you should develop the capability to take mental notes and if you do need to jot down, limit the notes to key words. This is because, one might tend to lose track of the discussion while writing down notes. However, it may be noted here that for people who are not speaking or haven't spoken, it might be a good practice to jot down notes, since it would demonstrate that the participant is active and involved in the discussion. It would also help one to summarize the discussion, in the eventuality of being called upon to do so by the invigilator. This is likely to happen to those who haven't been able to speak much / at all, in the entire discussion.

4. What if the topic of discussion is something I know very less about and I have no worthwhile points to make?

In this case, it is suggested to enter late. This would make you reasonably aware of the issues involved, enable you to take a thread and develop your view point. If you want to say something, then ensure that it is relevant and sensible. You can also identify new thoughts by looking at issues from your point of view (for e.g. if you are an arts student and the topic relates to software engineering, you could peak of the relevance of software in fields related to arts). There are other ways of participating in the GD, such as:

- Active Listening- through making notes and understanding the views expressed. Quite often the invigilators see how active and involved the participants are and active listening is considered as a good way of participation.
- Seek clarifications- Another way is to seek clarifications from the speaker. You may not have understood some part of what was said in which case you can interject with "excuse me, I didn't quite get it... can you clarify the first/last part" or "are you saying that".
- Play the role of mediator- as defined earlier in "What role should I play in the GD? Should I be aggressive, one who speaks less, a mediator or idea generator?"
- Summarizing the discussion- highlighting the key points that were covered in the discussion and any conclusion that might have been reached.
- Structuring thought process- by breaking down the topic into smaller parts and thinking through each part, one can easily identify a lot of angles which have not been thought of or discussed. So, if you do not have any idea about the topic, try and break it down into its parts (depending on the given topic).

5. What if no new points are being made in the GD and people are just stating the similar points in a round-about fashion?

This is a difficult situation but also an opportunity for you to display your creative skills. You can generate new thoughts by getting new ideas and dimensions in place. For instance, in the topic "Should there be reservation for women in Parliament?" you can expand the scope by including new dimensions such as:

- Why only women and not economically deprived sections of society?
- Not "women" in general but sub-reservations within this such as reservation for SC/ST Women, OBC Women etc.
- Assuming that reservation is needed, when should it be introduced; if introduced, should it be permanent? If not, for how long?

Identification of even one such dimension can vastly expand and enrich the discussion and often it is very easy to find such a dimension.

If nothing more can be said maybe you could summarize the discussion so far and encourage people to think about the implications (negatives and positives) of the issues and back-ups in case of contingencies. For example, if the discussion had come to stagnate at the point where everyone had agreed to reservation, you could ask what would happen if the quota were to be 30% instead of 33%? Also, how would the constituencies reserved for women be chosen? Does this mean that each party has to nominate at least 33% women candidates? What does this conclusion mean in practice? Another good way to expand the discussion is to discuss about parallels in other countries. For example, one might provide or ask about the practices in other democracies like US, UK etc. Parallels might bring out a dimension which has not been discussed so far. However, a word of caution is necessary - don't go too far away from the topic or identify a dimension which is too detailed - for instance, while it is interesting (and perhaps important too) to know whether the legal provision of providing 33% reservation to women would have been met if the Lady MP were to have been elected from a reserved (for SC/ST or for any other reason) constituency, this is a matter of detail and can shoot off on a different tangent.

6. What is more important - manner of presentation or the content?

Both. However, it is far more important to say something sensible than to say something at all. Hence, between the two, content is more important than presentation. Once content is in place, it helps to present your point in as nice a manner as possible. Presentation has more to do with conciseness and clarity, than with using vocabulary intensive language. It is okay if your method of presentation is "poor" as long as you can get your point of view across effectively without being rude or impolite. Examples of rude, impolite or unacceptable presentation/behaviour are:

- Even as another person is speaking, jumping into the discussion and starting to speak. In such cases, wait for a pause or if the speaker is not pausing, first establish eye contact and when firmly established, start with "if I may, what I think is...." Or "I agree with you. We could look at other facets such as"
- If you disagree with a point that has been made, then launching an attack on the point or worse still, on the person who made the point. The correct method is to start with "some of you have said which I disagree with. What I think is...."
- Using colloquial language like "the fundae is", "cool" or mixing vernacular with English (unless the vernacular is a relevant quote and can be understood by all - if not, follow the quote with its meaning in English)
- Forming a sub-group and carrying out a parallel discussion amongst yourselves or looking away from the group and focusing on something else - this will be considered as a sign of disinterest.

7. What if someone becomes antagonistic to me?

If someone becomes openly antagonistic to you, and says things directly contradicting your points of view or makes personal attack, stay calm and relaxed. A situation like this is a good opportunity to demonstrate your conflict handling skills and maturity.

- If the counter-argument is valid, concede to the point gracefully using statements like "I think you have an important point there that I did not think of".
- If the counter-argument is not valid, use statements like "let's seek the opinion of other participants" and turn to others, seeking their opinion with statements like "we seem to have different views here...what do you feel?"
- If the attack is directed against you as a person, then the best strategy is to just ignore it and get on with the discussion, without any animosity towards the attacker. This is hard to do but if you manage, it will be the best advertisement for your maturity.
- "Losing" an argument is not bad - even if you are convinced about the correctness of your stand, don't stand on it - let the other person "win" it by saying "I know that you may disagree, but my point is..., however, we need not keep debating this, maybe we need to proceed". Losing an argument does not lead to loss of points. Sometimes, it helps demonstrate your flexibility and maturity.

8. What should I do if the GD assumes a fish market like situation?

Group discussions often turn into a fish market if there is lack of direction or an effective leadership. Such a situation can adversely impact the performance

of all the candidates. Go through the following five important points to tackle a 'fish market' situation effectively:

- Do the unexpected
 - The unexpected results in a sudden shock: The fish market situation is a desperate situation to be in. Doing the unexpected may act as a momentary jolt for the group and give you an opportunity to add immediate value.
 - The shock can act as a momentary pacifier: Such a strategy creates a quick vacuum for you to rush into and get the stage for a short while.
 - Unexpected can be a quick example, a short story or a befitting data: A story, a quote or a data input are some of the tools for doing the unexpected. All of these have a potential to create an awe factor for you.
- Form Allies
 - Fish market is the result of contradictory views/opinions: A fish market situation usually arises out of conflicting opinions and may be avoided if you are able to seamlessly align with the group members.
 - Identify the person(s) you wish to support: It may not be possible to support all the participants as it will kill the essence of a discussion. But you are advised to identify the ones you wish to resonate with.
 - Collaborate effectively: Once you know the set of participants you desire to associate with, plan your strategy accordingly. Collaborating with them may help you leverage the power of synergy.
- Use Voice/Eye Contact Techniques
 - Modulate upwards to enter the discussion and then downwards to plant your point.
 - Look at the person whom you wish to counter; start from there and then take your eyes off that person in a quick swing of neck to establish an eye contact elsewhere.
- Assign a Sequence
 - This is the last resort: Assigning a sequence is actually against the essence of natural discussion and may be resorted to only if all other channels fail.
 - Intervene with a persuasive tone and propose a sequential order of speaking.
 - Start with someone who has been high on 'speaking inertia', as he/she is more likely to hold on to the opportunity.
 - Ensure that nobody overshoots the tentative time window.
- Avoid the following:

- Speaking for the sake of speaking: You get only a limited time to add value to the discussion. Don't waste that in redundant and random inroads.
- Being irrationally rigid: If you are convinced that the other someone has valid discussion points, don't hesitate to accept that point. It reflects willingness to learn from others.
- Getting into an argument with 'loud' personalities.

9. How should I conclude the GD?

The conclusion represents the final stage of the Group Discussion (GD) Round that follows the initial stage when each member gets a chance to speak his opening remarks and the stage when the discussion is thrown open to everyone in the group. The conclusion happens when all members of the group have got turns to speak on the issue under consideration. The members of the group have discussed various aspects of the issue and given arguments both in favour of and against the issue. The moderator then asks the candidates for their concluding remarks, which, in a way, also reflect the candidate's understanding of the discussion that happened- whether the candidate paid attention and understood the entire discussion or not.

- Sum up
 - For candidates who have actively participated in the discussion, thinking of their concluding remarks becomes easier as they have kept a track of the various points that have been discussed. Since they have followed the entire discussion very closely, providing a brief sum up to the GD is not difficult for them. Candidates should focus on summarizing the entire discussion and track the flow of the discussion. Conclusion gives a chance to the candidates to reinforce the points they feel are important and helps them get noticed for one last time.
- No new points
 - Candidates should keep in mind that they should not bring up any new point in their concluding remarks. This is because conclusion happens towards the very end of the discussion and the candidate does not get the luxury of introducing a new point and then justifying the point by providing evidence. The audiences too don't expect anything new in the conclusion. A reiteration of the important points of the discussion should suffice for the concluding remarks.
- Be Concise
 - Candidates get very little time to speak their concluding remarks and therefore, must use it wisely. Instead of introducing new points, giving new examples, and unnecessarily stretching the

conclusion, the candidates should articulate their thoughts concisely and as briefly as possible.

- Keep the conclusion general
 - It's not a good idea to keep the conclusion limited to a particular point of view in the discussion. It is better to keep the conclusion general. The focus should be on capturing the most significant points raised in the discussion. The candidates must refrain from focusing on his own points but provide a good summary of the GD.
- Rephrase
 - When you get the chance to conclude the GD, instead of stating what the members said exactly, it is better to sum up in your words. It is assumed that everyone in the group has listened to the discussion and know the points well. The challenge then, is to say the same points in a different way, so that the points don't come across as repetitive.
- Grab your chance
 - If you get the chance to conclude the GD, you should grab it with both hands and use this opportunity to your advantage. This is your chance to prove that you have the qualities of a good leader. While concluding, remarks such as "It was indeed a very healthy discussion and the members brought in different perspectives and enriched the discussion", will project you as a leader, who knows how to acknowledge and respect his team members. Your concluding remarks should represent a balance, and remain free from your personal biases and opinions. It is a great way to get noticed as you have all the information, facts and data in front of you. You just have to be smart enough to use this to your advantage.

The beginning, as well as, the conclusion are important aspects of speaking or writing. While it is important to begin well, it is equally important to end well. The candidates should keep the above points in mind and construct an impressive conclusion.