

FEW TIPS ON GROUP DISCUSSION

What is a GD?

A Group Discussion can be defined as a formal discussion involving 8 to 16 participants in a group. They are given a topic to discuss within a given frame of time.

Just reiterating the cliché that a Group discussion, or GD, as it is commonly called, is a group process or a team building exercise does not help. 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 team work, incorporating views of different team members to reach a common goal.

The Group Discussion plays an important part in the process of recruitment. It is actually a process of elimination to get to the final round of students for that personal interview. It is usually conducted when there are many candidates applying for a few available vacancies. Also it is usually used for selecting freshers and is never used in case of lateral hiring.

As all the participants in a Group Discussion are rivals, there is bound to be competition and clash of interests among them. Everyone in the group would be keen to top in the discussion, resulting in a good deal of rivalry and maneuvering for situations of advantage. Thus in the group discussion - in this free for all - you have to manage others and get the cooperation of the group by continuously relating to situations as they keep developing and changing. The dynamics of the group will stimulate each candidate to reveal his/her inherent natural leadership qualities in a spontaneous manner. But only those who remain alert by adapting himself / herself to the changing situations as they emerge, and only those who utilize the opportunities with enterprise, imagination and tact come out successfully.

Under these circumstances, the conduct and behavior of each candidate will bring to the surface his or her natural leadership, social, dynamic and organizing abilities in a spontaneous manner.

The Desirable Attitudes in GD?

The participants should adopt two important attitudes which alone will facilitate a productive and satisfying outcome in any Group Discussion:

All participants in the group must accept responsibility for the smooth conduct of the group activities. In an effective group discussion, there are no absolute followers but different levels and kinds of leaderships and these leaderships keep fluctuating.

Another important attitude is open-mindedness & the willingness of the candidate to consider a broad range of ideas and suggestions from others. He must be flexible and must be open to change. Instead of taking rigid stands on issues, the flexible member tries to adapt to the best interests of the group. This requires objectivity in order to make unbiased, impartial judgments. Participants should try and project a superiority complex and must realize that the fellow participants are equal to him/her in all aspects. One should realize the importance of one's verbal ability, depth of knowledge, extent of ideas, logical reasoning and the convincing capacity during a GD.

How to look at a GD

A group discussion can be categorically divided into three different phases:

- i. Initiation/ Introduction
- ii. Body of the group discussion
- iii. Summarisation/ Conclusion

Let's stress on the initiation and summarisation:

Initiation Techniques

Initiating a GD is a high profit-high loss strategy.

When you initiate a GD, you not only grab the opportunity to speak, you also grab the attention of everybody present. In some cases the facilitators dictate who will initiate the GD. In such a situation, if you are not too familiar with the topic, roll the ball with some generic introduction. Keeping quiet is not a good idea.

If you can make a favourable first impression with your content and communication skills after you initiate a GD, it will help you sail through the discussion.

But if you initiate a GD and stammer/ stutter/ quote wrong facts and figures, the damage might be irreparable.

If you initiate a GD impeccably but don't speak much after that, it gives the impression that you started the GD for the sake of starting it. This may show that you are otherwise not interested in the discussion. It may also give an impression that you are an egoist who wants his subjects to take forward what he started, while he watches from the pedestal. The initial good impact will be lost if you do not participate further.

When you start a GD, you are responsible for putting it into the right perspective or framework. So initiate only if you have in-depth knowledge about the topic at hand.

There are different techniques to initiate a GD and make a good first impression:

- i. Quotes
- ii. Definition
- iii. Question
- iv. Shock statements
- v. Facts, figures and statistics
- vi. Short stories
- vii. General statement

~ Quotes

- Quotes are an effective way of initiating a GD.

~ Definition

- Start a GD by defining the topic or an important term in the topic.

~ Question

- Asking a question is an impactful way of starting a GD.
- It does not signify asking a question to any of the candidates in a GD so as to hamper the flow. It implies asking a question, and answering it yourself.
- Any question that might hamper the flow of a GD or insult a participant or play devil's advocate must be discouraged.
- Questions that promote a flow of ideas are always appreciated.

~ Shock statement

- Initiating a GD with a shocking statement is the best way to grab immediate attention and put forth your point.

~ Facts, figures and statistics

- If you decide to initiate your GD with facts, figure and statistics make sure to quote them accurately.
- Approximation is allowed in macro level figures, but micro level figures need to be correct and accurate.
- Stating wrong facts works to your disadvantage.

~ Short story

~ General statement

- Use a general statement to put the GD in proper perspective.

<i>Notes:</i>

Summarization Techniques

Most GDs do not really have conclusions. A conclusion is where the whole group decides in favour or against the topic.

But every GD is summarised. You can summarise what the group has discussed in the GD in a nutshell.

Keep the following points in mind while summarising a discussion:

- Avoid raising new points.
- Avoid stating only your viewpoint.
- Avoid dwelling only on one aspect of the GD.
- Keep it brief and concise.
- It must incorporate all the important points that came out during the GD.
- If the examiner asks you to summarise a GD, it means the GD has come to an end. Do not add anything once the GD has been summarised.

Notes:

Some Personality Traits Of The Candidate's That Are Sought In A GD.

1. Team Player

At the beginning of his career, a manager works as a team member and, later, as a team leader. It is usually found that management aspirants who lack team skills cannot be good managers.

2. Reasoning Ability

Reasoning ability plays an important role while expressing your opinions or ideas at a GD.

3. Leadership

There are three types of situations that can arise in a GD:

- i. Where participants are unable to establish a proper rapport and do not speak much.
- ii. Where participants get emotionally charged and the GD gets chaotic.
- iii. Where participants discuss the topic assertively by touching on all its nuances and try to reach the objective.

Here, a leader would be someone who facilitates the third situation at a GD.

A leader would have the following qualities:

- Show direction to the group whenever group moves away from the topic.
- Coordinate the effort of the different team members in the GD.
- Contribute to the GD at regular intervals with valuable insights.
- Inspire and motivate team members to express their views.

Caution: Being a mere coordinator in a GD does not help, because it is a secondary role.

It is important to contribute to the GD with ideas and opinions and also try and steer the conversation towards a goal.

4. Flexibility

You must be open to other ideas as well as to the evaluation of your ideas: That is what flexibility is all about.

Never ever start your GD with a stand or a conclusion.

Some participants tend to get emotionally attached to the topic and take a stand either in favour or against the topic. By taking a stand, you have already given your decision without discussing the topic at hand or listening to the views of the team members.

5. Assertiveness

You must put forth your point to the group in a very emphatic, positive and confident manner.

Participants often confuse assertiveness with aggressiveness. Aggressiveness is all about forcing your point on the other person, and can be a threat to the group. An aggressive person can also demonstrate negative body language, whereas an assertive person displays positive body language.

6. Initiative

Initiate a GD only if you are well versed with the topic. If you start and fail to contribute at regular intervals, it gives the impression that you started the GD just for the sake of the initial points.

Also, if you fumble, stammer or misquote facts, it may work against you.

Remember: You never ever get a second chance to create a first impression.

7. Creativity/ Out of the box thinking

An idea or a perspective which opens new horizons for discussion on the GD topic is always highly appreciated. When you put across a new idea convincingly, such that it is discussed at length by the group, it can only be positive.

8. Inspiring ability

A good group discussion should incorporate views of all the team members.

If some team members want to express their ideas but are not getting the opportunity to do so, giving them an opportunity to express their ideas or opinions will be seen as a positive trait.

Caution: If a participant is not willing to speak, you need not necessarily go out of the way to ask him to express his views. This may insult him and hamper the flow of the GD.

9. Listening

Always try and strike a proper balance between expressing your ideas and imbibing ideas.

10. Awareness

You must be well versed with both the micro and macro environment. Your awareness about the environment helps a lot in your GD content, which is also important.

Caution: The content or awareness generally constitutes 40 to 50 percent marks of your GD.

Apart from these qualities, communication skills, confidence and the ability to think on one's feet are also very important.

What to Avoid

- Do not dominate the GD even when you are very conversant with the topic of discussion. This is a discussion and not a monologue.
- Do not become aggressive. Being assertive is desirable but aggression is to be avoided whatever the situation may be.
- Do not take a back seat throughout the GD. Even if you are not comfortable with the topic try and gather information while others are talking and put those thoughts on the table in your own words. Not saying anything throughout the GD will be a disaster on the part of the participant.
- Do not Lose your temper under any circumstances.

Notes:

