

Group Discussion

INTRODUCTION TO GROUP DISCUSSION

Group Discussion [GD] is a formal discussion involving 10 to 12 participants in a group. They are given a topic and some time to think about, during which they collect their thoughts, the group is then asked to discuss the topic for 20 to 25 minutes.

Like in a football game, where one 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 conclusion along with individual performance.

Strategies for Group Success

These are few things which one must keep in mind during a group discussion.

When you speak you must reflect willingness to lead and take responsibilities.

- Group interest should be given priority over self-interest.
- Use soft expressions such as “as you rightly said”. When you want to differ, open with expressions such as “While agreeing with you to some extent, I may add”, or “May I show another side of the picture so as to benefit all of us in arriving at the right conclusions?”
- Try to be yourself. Do not speak for the sake of speaking; what you speak should have substance. Never blow your own trumpet.
- One of the personality traits that is under careful scrutiny is; what kind of team player are you? You may assume that your behavior is in tune with good teamwork. But your words, expressions, and body language might send a different message. This flaw has to be corrected beforehand with the help of discerning friends.
- Dress neatly for the occasion and assume a pleasing body language.

- Focus on the precise aspects of the subject. There is no point in beating about the bush. If you have any doubt about the exact nature of the topic given, do not hesitate to get a clarification from the examiner.
- Seek permission from the examiner whether you can take notes [should you need to] during the discussion. Do not make exhaustive notes; instead you may note down the exact words of the topic, and the points you intend to raise later in the discussion when you get a chance to do so. Practice this art of listing indicative words of thoughts to expand later rather than long sentences.
- However exhaustive a theoretical analysis may be, it cannot be a substitute for actual participation in a group discussion even if it is a mock one. Mock sessions will help you get feedback, and correct yourself wherever required. If someone feels that he does not need any rehearsal, he may probably regret later. Remember the fellow participants in a group may have had extensive preparation for fine-tuning their performance.

GETTING STARTED

What does the examiner check?

- Content of your contribution
- Communication - listening skills and succinct response
- Precision in conveying ideas, language and body language
- Your behavior in the group
- Leadership skills

What he tries to know?

- Whether you have the necessary qualities required for a specific job
- How you respond to a differing view
- How you promote backbenchers
- How well you find ways for solving problems

- How well you would resolve complex issues
- How well you communicate your ideas
- How well you would take responsibilities
- Your push/initiative/drive/confidence

If you happen to emerge as a natural leader, do try to develop group synergy, and give an acceptable conclusion at the close.

BEING AN EFFECTIVE PARTICIPANT IN CLASS DISCUSSION

Some of the most important personality traits that a candidate should possess to do well at a GD:

Team Player

Great emphasis is laid on this quality because it is essential for managers to be team players. [The reason: Managers always work in teams.]

At the beginning of his career, a manager works as a team member. Management students who lack team skills cannot become good managers.

Reasoning Ability

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

[For example, an opinion like 'Reduction in fees will affect quality' can be better stated by demonstrating your reasoning ability and completing the missing links between fees and quality as:

'Reduction in fees will result in less funds being invested on study material, student exchange programs, research, student development activities, etc.

'Moreover, it costs money to attract good faculty, create good infrastructure and upgrade technology.

'With reduction in fees, less money will be available to perform these activities which will lead to deterioration in the quality of education]

Leadership

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

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

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.
- Also inspire and motivate team members to express their views.

Contribute to the GD with your ideas and opinions, but also try and steer the conversation towards a goal.

Flexibility

Be open to others' 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**.

[Say the topic of a GD is, 'Should India go to war with Pakistan?']

Some participants tend to get emotionally attached to the topic and take a stand either in favour or against the topic, i.e. 'Yes, India should', or, 'No, India should not'.

By taking a stand, you have already given your decision without discussing the topic at hand or listening to the views of your team members.

Also, if you encounter an opposition with a very strong point at the 11th hour, you end up in a typical catch-22 situation:

- If you change your stand, you are seen as a fickle-minded or a whimsical person.
- If you do not change your stand, you are seen as an inflexible, stubborn and obstinate person.

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.

Initiative

A general trend amongst students is to start a GD and get the initial points earmarked for the initiator. But that is a high risk-high return strategy.

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.

Creativity

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.

You will find yourself in the good books of the examiner.

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.

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.

Listening

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

Awareness

Your awareness about your environment helps a lot in your GD content, which carries maximum marks. Apart from these qualities, communication skills, confidence and the ability to think on one's feet are also very important. **Build, Operate & Transfer (BOT) approach to GD training.**

PREAMBLE

Today, in most of the workplace situations, performance depends on team work, whether it is at the entry level, mid level or apex level. For team work to be effective, 'team storming' and discussions are important. Working with the internal clients and external clients necessitates formal and informal discussions. Discussion is a significant methodology to set one's views forth and have a collective understanding / clarity /decision, on a given topic.

Objective

The objective of GD Training, GD Practice, GD Tests, GD Evaluation and GD Grading is to enable the students to clear the GD round in the FP selection process.

Relevance

GD as a selection test needs structured training and practice before the students can be put to tests and evaluation.

Training to Precede GD Practice

Based on past experience, it is evident that there is no point in taking part in a GD without getting trained for GD. Merely practising GD does not address fundamental issues.

However, all students do not need all the phases of GD Training. Students with higher foundation skills for GD can enter an appropriate higher phase directly. GD foundation training comes from various sources, some of which are:

(a) verbal communication training

(b) **content training** as part of domain sessions which includes, but is not limited to:

- reading seminars
- panel discussion
- article writing
- paper presentation
- domain quiz
- domain presentations
- management fest

awareness training

(d) Body language training

What the tongue proposes let the body not dispose. Body language is an important component of GD skills. Particularly:

- sitting posture
- eye contact
- subtle but participative facial expression, hand gesture
- involved behavior
- cool body, but not cold body

(e) Listening training

Listening is important to enable a candidate to follow and participate in all the phases of a GD. The phases are launch, mid stream, consolidation and winding up.

GD specific listening values are mainly:

- listening to follow the points of other participants
- listening to trigger fresh thoughts
- listening to fine tune own points
- listening for team orientation
- listening to avoid repetition
- frequent GD topics awareness training

Brainstorming Methodology

- define the problem or issue or whatever the topic of the GD be
- keep the session focused on the core topic.
- ensure that no one criticizes or evaluates ideas during the session.
- encourage an enthusiastic, uncritical attitude among members of the group.
- try to get everyone to contribute and develop ideas, including the quietest members of the group.
- let people have fun brainstorming. Encourage them to come up with as many ideas as possible, from solidly practical ones to wildly impractical ones. Welcome creativity.
- ensure that no particular train of thought is followed far too long.
- encourage people to develop other people's ideas, or to use other ideas to create new ones.

- appoint one person to note down ideas that come out of the session. This should be studied and evaluated after the session.

TOPICS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

These topics can be divided in three categories.

Controversial: We observe emotional response in this type of topic. some of the example is given below:

- 1.Love marriage versus arrange marriage
- 2.Should India war against Pakistan
3. Is It Necessary to Ban Coco Cola in India.
4. Corruption is the Price We Pay For Democracy.
- 5.Cricket as a National Obsession is a Detriment to Other Sports.
- 6.Does banning fashion shows and new year parties save our culture?
- 7.Big dams are not the temples of modern India

Social Topics

- 1.Effect of Cinema on Youth.
- 2.Education in India Compared to Foreign Nations.
3. Is Dependence on Computers a Good Thing?
4. The Impact of MTV on Our Psyche
- 5.Managerial Skills Learnt in the Classroom Can Never Match Those Learnt From experience.
- 6.Honesty is not the best policy for an ordinary citizen in India.
- 7.Truth in Advertising.
- 8.If you were the Prime Minister?
- 9.Job reservation is not to be extended indefinitely.
- 10.Arranged marriages are a curse in India.
- 11.Indecent advertising should be banned.

Abstract Topics

Red is Red

Pressure cooker

Grass is Green

These types of topics are given to understand participants capability of analyze and interpretation of a simple thing into some theory. This also shows his imagination power and wider frame of thinking.

REFRAME DISAGREEMENTS IN CONSTRUCTIVE WAYS

Advanced Strategies

Sometimes you may be in an unenviable position, since all your points have already been touched by the previous speakers, leaving little to you for original contribution. As a goal-oriented participant, you do not want to parrot what others have already discussed.

What then is your option? There are indeed fine strategies to tide over such a predicament. Let us illustrate three different strategies, in respect of the topic, “Too much of freedom of the people is the bane of Indian democracy”.

Keyword approach: Too much of freedom of the people is the bane of Indian democracy. You can start off by giving the definitions of the keywords: ‘too much’, ‘freedom’, ‘people’ and ‘democracy’. You could say that there is no uniformly accepted norm for defining ‘too much’.

What is too much for one person may be inadequate for another. You may then illustrate it by examples. So also, dwell upon the other marked words, ‘freedom’, ‘people’, and ‘democracy’, one by one. You would thereby present a lot of interesting views on the topic.

Viewpoint of affected parties: In this case, you may analyse the use and misuse of freedom by various segments of the people such as politicians, trade union leaders, students and unorganised citizens who bear the brunt of the blatant misuse of freedom by powerful vested interests.

Analysis: Analyse the proposition from different angles such as social, economic, political, cultural and legal. All the angles may not be relevant in every case.

Types of discussions

Not all discussions are alike. They can be classified depending on the content and style.

Topic-based: Knowledge-based (e.g. WTO, Article 356 of the Indian Constitution, inter-State disputes of river water); Abstract (e.g. Ethics form the foundation of the progress of any country) and Case-based

In the group discussion that forms part of the Service Selection Board interview for the selection of defense service officers, a complex practical problem based on a difficult situation may be highlighted with the help of pictures or models, and the group asked to discuss the issue and arrive at a workable solution to the problem.

Quality is a myth in India. The following points could be discussed under this topic:

The Indian products and manufacturing techniques: Why are we unable to sustain against global competition. Our mindset towards quality, Indian attitude of “chalta hai” which leads to an undemanding customer which in turn lets people get away with substandard products and services. Today competition is forcing our industry to adhere to global standards so we are getting there in terms of quality. Examples: Our software industry which is recognised for its ability to meet global standards etc. Since the topic is general, we can extrapolate it to our quality of life-the air, the water, the facilities we have, the infrastructure we have, the services we get and put up withetc.....

- Cricket is a criminal waste of time.

OPENING OUR EYES TO DIFFERENCES AMONG GROUP MEMBERS

Wise men learn from others mistakes, while the less fortunate, from their own.

Here's a list of the most common mistakes made at group discussions.

Emotional outburst

Rashmi was offended when one of the male participants in a group discussion made a statement on women generally being submissive while explaining his point of view. When Rashmi finally got an opportunity to speak, instead of focusing on the

topic, she vented her anger by accusing the other candidate for being a male chauvinist and went on to defend women in general. What Rashmi essentially did was to

- Deviate from the subject.
- Treat the discussion as a forum to air her personal views.
- Lose objectivity and make personal attacks.

Her behaviour may be perceived as immature and de-motivating to the rest of the team.

Quality Vs Quantity

Gautam believed that the more he talked, the more likely he was to get through the GD. So, he interrupted other people at every opportunity. He did this so often that the other candidates got together to prevent him from participating in the rest of the discussion.

- Assessment is not only on your communication skills but also on your ability to be a team player.
- Evaluation is based on quality, and not on quantity. Your contribution must be relevant.
- The mantra is **“Contributing meaningfully to the team’s success.”** Domination is frowned upon.

Egotism - Showing off

Krishna was happy to have got a group discussion topic he had prepared for. So, he took pains to project his vast knowledge of the topic. Every other sentence of his contained statistical data - “20% of companies; 24.27% of parliamentarians felt that; I recently read in a Business Magazine that...” and so on so forth. Soon, the rest of the team either laughed at him or ignored his attempts to enlighten them as they perceived that he was cooking up the data.

- Exercise restraint in anything. You will end up being frowned upon if you attempt showing-off your knowledge.
- Facts and figures need not validate all your statements.
- It’s your analysis and interpretation that are equally important - not just facts and figures.

- You might be appreciated for your in-depth knowledge. But you will fail miserably in your people skills.

Such a behavior indicates how self-centered you are and highlights your inability to work in an atmosphere where different opinions are expressed.

Get noticed - But for the right reasons

Srikumar knew that everyone would compete to initiate the discussion. So as soon as the topic - “Discuss the negative effects of India joining the WTO” - was read out, he began talking. In his anxiety to be the first to start speaking, he did not hear the word “negative” in the topic. He began discussing the ways in which the country had benefited by joining WTO, only to be stopped by the evaluator, who then corrected his mistake.

- False starts are extremely expensive. They cost you your admission. It is very important to listen and understand the topic before you air your opinions.
- Spending a little time analyzing the topic may provide you with insights which others may not have thought about. Use a pen and paper to jot down your ideas.
- Listen! It gives you the time to conceptualize and present the information in a better manner.

Some mistakes are irreparable. Starting off the group discussion with a mistake is one such mistake, unless you have a great sense of humor.

Managing one's insecurities

Sumati was very nervous. She thought that some of the other candidates were exceptionally good. Thanks to her insecurity, she contributed little to the discussion. Even when she was asked to comment on a particular point, she preferred to remain silent.

- Your personality is also being evaluated. Your verbal and non verbal cues are being read.
- Remember, you are the participant in the GD; not the evaluator. So, rather than evaluating others and your performance, participate in the discussion.

- Your confidence level is being evaluated. Decent communication skills with good confidence are a must to crack the GDs.

Focus on your strengths and do not spend too much time thinking about how others are superior or inferior to you. It is easy to pick up these cues from your body language.

An example of how to go about with the Group Discussion:

Topic-Effect of Cinema on Youth: [Group of 5 Members]

The **first participant** comes out with a view that cinemas have an educative value and do give a message to the youth

The **second participant**, opines that in today's fast moving world and in the midst of hectic activities, watching cinema definitely has an entertaining value. Watching an entertaining movie helps in breaking the monotony of life and adds spice to life etc.....

The **third participant** feels that idolizing a positive character in a movie goes a long way in enhancing one's personality....

The **fourth student** though he agrees with the other participants with regard to educative/entertaining value, feels that cinema is a nuisance as the students are more conditioned towards the negative side and unnecessarily waste their precious time towards watching and later discussing the same

The **fifth participant** feels that there are both positive and negative aspects and we need to identify and take the best and block the negative aspects.....

Finally one of the participants takes the initiative and wraps up the whole discussion balancing the views of all the participants.

Interactive Strategies and Useful Expressions of GD

To begin the GD-

Here one can start with-It is thought provoking topic. Let's start the discussion.

Our topic of discussion is very important and useful all of us. Let's start.

Let me explain/interpret the concept first.

I feel that ... is a big problem today.

To continue the discussion

That is really an interesting point, but can I add another point...

Well, that is true; I can add factual information your point.

Your point is valid point. Let's discuss further on this aspect with examples...

This is not acceptable. Can we analyze this issue further?

To give Opinion

I am of the view...

In my opinion...

I have no doubt on that but...

So far as views are concerned...

My experience says..

To ask opinion

My I know your opinion on this..

What do think on this?

Can you explain your opinion on this?

How do you look into this matter?

Does anybody have anything to say?

Is there any specific comment on this?

To defend your opinion

Let me restate what I mean....

I repeat what I said earlier...

What I am trying to say is...

This is what, I am trying to suggest...

To seek clarification

You saidwhat does that implies?

Pl wait what you mean to say is...

If I understand your statement correctly, it is...

To accept other's view

That is definitely a right approach

U na sribgkt ub faviyr if tgat...

It is the best solution..

This is a good idea...

To reject other's view

It is not possible..

It is not feasible...

I am sorry but ...

It is not possible on practical ground..

I find myself strongly against ...

To avoid aggression

Can you hold for a minute...

Can you please stop for a while?

Just a minute please

Let me clarify this view'

To intervene continuous talk of others

Sorry to disturb you but I would like to add a point here...

Excuse me friends I differ here...

Let me have a word...

Can I say something here?

Before we go further let us...

To avoid interruption politely

Let me complete my point..

Please allow me to complete my point of view

Can you hold for a minute?Let me complete my sentence atleast.

You have point,let me...

That is a good point but I still think that..

I appreciate your point,but..

Your point sounds interesting ,but...

To make the reticent participant to participate

What is your point of view..

Would you like to share your views?

Would you like to express your views?

Do you accept this...

To give in/Supporting any point

I concede...

I take that back...

I now see the point...

I accept your argument...

I withdraw as I understand...

To focus on the discussion

I think we are off the track...

I think there is other view we should think, for example...The focus of the discussion is...

Yes I didn't think from that angle...

Let's avoid digression.

I do understand your point but let's stick to main subject..

To disagree with others

I don't agree with you on this point...

This is not the issue...

I think differently..

I think there is other side of coin too..