

Group Discussion

It refers to oral communication situation in which a small number of professionals meet and discuss a problem or issue to arrive at a consensus or to exchange information on a significant matter related to the function, growth or expansion of an organization. It is used to judge the suitability of the candidate.

The word discuss derived from Latin word means “to shake” or “strike”. It stands for an activity where theme or matter is thoroughly shaken, inquired or examined so as to reach a conclusion to decide upon a course of action. Its different from conversation or debate.

Minds, when united, can move mountains.

Qualities in a candidate

- **Leadership quality:**
 - **taking initiative**
 - **Ability to give direction**
 - **Taking the group along**
 - **Listening**
 - **Goal fulfillment**
- **Knowledge of subject matter:**
 - **Presentation of details**
 - **Error free presentation**
- **Analytical ability: Argumentative approach**
- **Clarity of thought:**
 - **Distillation of essentials**
 - **Emphasis on substantive aspects**
- **Conviction & flexibility:**
 - **Strength with which argument is posited**
 - **Flexible approach**

Moderator in GD

GD takes place in the presence of observer. His role is to learn and monitor process of discussion. He keeps watch on participants and participation.

What skills are judged in group discussion?

- How good you are at communication with others.
- How you behave and interact with group.
- How open minded are you.
- Your listening skill.
- How you put forward your views.
- Your leadership and decision making skills.
- Your analysis skill and subject knowledge.
- Problem solving and critical thinking skill.
- Your attitude and confidence.

Do's and Don'ts

- **Do**
- **Define topic**
- **Analyze scope and implication**
- **Initiate discussion**
- **Listen views intently**
- **Encourage and provide members time to speak**
- **Intervene forcefully but politely**
- **Summarize views**
- **Be brief**
- **Try to lead the group**
- **Emphasize your point**
- **Maintain eye contact**

Do's cont.

- **Use proper pronunciation**
- **Make conclusion**
- **Maintain relax atmosphere**
- **Follow oral communication principles**
- **Substantiate with examples**
- **Speak in audible voice**
- **Speak pleasantly and politely to the group.**
- **Respect the contribution of every speaker.**
- **Remember that a discussion is not an argument. Learn to disagree politely.**
- **Think about your contribution before you speak. How best can you answer the question/ contribute to the topic?**
- **Try to stick to the discussion topic. Don't introduce irrelevant information.**
- **Be aware of your body language when you are speaking.**
- **Agree with and acknowledge what you find interesting.**

Don'ts

- **Don't be assertive**
- **Don't dominate**
- **Don't monopolies discussion**
- **Don't make personal remarks**
- **Don't jump to conclusions**
- **Don't enter in between the discussion**
- **Don't speak continuously**
- **Don't raise voice too high or too low**
- **Don't speak in a monotone**
- **Avoid speech with time-fillers**
- **No aggressive gestures**
- **Don't lean forward**
- **Don't ignore any member**
- **Don't give casual looks**
- **Don't interrupt others**
- **Don't use slang and improper language**

Do's and Don'ts of Group discussion:

- **1) Keep eye contact while speaking:**
Do not look at the evaluators only. Keep eye contact with every team member while speaking.
- **2) Initiate the GD:**
Initiating the GD is a big plus. But keep in mind - Initiate the group discussion only when you understood the GD topic clearly and have some topic knowledge. Speaking without proper subject knowledge is bad impression.
- **3) Allow others to speak:**
Do not interrupt anyone in-between while speaking. Even if you don't agree with his/her thoughts do not snatch their chance to speak. Instead make some notes and clear the points when it's your turn.
- **4) Speak clearly:**
Speak politely and clearly. Use simple and understandable words while speaking. Don't be too aggressive if you are disagreeing with someone. Express your feelings calmly and politely.

Do's and Don'ts of Group discussion:

- **5) Make sure to bring the discussion on track:**
If by any means group is distracting from the topic or goal then simply take initiative to bring the discussion on the track. Make all group members aware that you all need to come to some conclusion at the end of the discussion. So stick to the topic.
- **6) Positive attitude:**
Be confident. Do not try to dominate anyone. Keep positive body language. Show interest in discussion.
- **7) Speak sensibly:**
Do not speak just to increase your speaking time. Don't worry even if you speak less. Your thoughts should be sensible and relevant instead of irrelevant speech.
- **8) Listen carefully to others:**
Speak less and listen more! Pay attention while others are speaking. This will make coherent discussion and you will get involved in the group positively. You will surely make people agree with you.
- **9) No need to go into much details:**
Some basic subject analysis is sufficient. No need to mention exact figures while giving any reference. You have limited time so be precise and convey your thoughts in short and simple language.
- **10) Formal dressing:**
Do not take it casually. No fancy and funny dressing. You should be comfortable while speaking in group. Positive gesture and body language will make your work easy.

Personality traits that a candidate should possess to do well at a GD:

- **Team Player**
- **Reasoning Ability**
- **Leadership**
- **Flexibility**
- **Assertiveness**
- **Initiative**
- **Creativity/ Out of the box thinking**
- **Inspiring ability**
- **Listening**
- **Awareness**

Group Discussion Common Tips

- **Be as natural as possible. Do not try and be someone you are not. Be yourself.**
- **A group discussion is your chance to be more vocal. The evaluator wants to hear you speak.**
- **Take time to organize your thoughts.**
- **Seek clarification if you have any doubts.**
- **Don't start speaking until you have clearly understood and analyzed.**
- **Work out various strategies to help you make an entry.**
- **Opening the discussion is not the only way of gaining attention and recognition.**
- **Give valuable insights during the discussion or all your efforts of initiating the discussion will be in vain.**
- **Your body language says a lot about you - your gestures and mannerisms are more likely to reflect your attitude than what you say.**
- **Language skills are important only to the effect as to how you get your points across clearly and fluently.**
- **Be assertive not dominating; try to maintain a balanced tone in your discussion and analysis.**

GD Common Mistakes

- **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 focussing 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 own views.
- Lose objectivity and make personal attacks.
- Her behaviour would have been perceived as immature and demotivating to the rest of the team.

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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.

Cont. Mistakes

- Evaluation is based on quality, and not on quantity. The 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 Jupiter Report 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.

Cont. Mistakes

Get noticed - But for the right reasons

Sri kumar 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.

Cont. mistakes

- 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 is 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.

How to face GD

- **A group discussion consists of -**
- Communication Skills
- Knowledge and ideas regarding a given subject
- Capability to co-ordinate and lead
- Exchange of thoughts
- Addressing the group as a whole
- Thorough preparations

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 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.

GD Types

GDs can be **topic-based** or **case-based**.

- Topic based Gds can be classified into three types -
 1. Factual Topics
 2. Controversial Topics
 3. Abstract Topics
- **Case-based Gd** -

Another variation is the use of a case instead of a topic. The case study tries to simulate a real-life situation. Information about the situation will be given to you and you would be asked as a group to resolve the situation. In the case study there are no incorrect answers or perfect solutions. The objective in the case study is to get you to think about the situation from various angles.

IIM A, IIM Indore and IIT SOM Mumbai have a case-based discussion rather than topic-based discussion in their selection procedures.

Topic-based

- **Factual Topics -**

Factual topics are about practical things, which an ordinary person is aware of in his day-to-day life. Typically these are about socio-economic topics. These can be current, i.e. they may have been in the news lately, or could be unbound by time. A factual topic for discussion gives a candidate a chance to prove that he is aware of and sensitive to his environment.

E.g. The education policy of India, Tourism in India, State of the aged in the nation.

Controversial Topics -

Controversial topics are the ones that are argumentative in nature. They are meant to generate controversy. In GDs where these topics are given for discussion, the noise level is usually high, there may be tempers flying. The idea behind giving a topic like this is to see how much maturity the candidate is displaying by keeping his temper in check, by rationally and logically arguing his point of view without getting personal and emotional.

E.g. Reservations should be removed, Women make better managers

- **Abstract Topics -**

Abstract topics are about intangible things. These topics are not given often for discussion, but their possibility cannot be ruled out. These topics test your lateral thinking and creativity.

E.g. A is an alphabet, Twinkle twinkle little star, The number 10

Why do we Need a GD

- It helps you to understand a subject more deeply.
- It improves your ability to think critically.
- It helps in solving a particular problem.
- It helps the group to make a particular decision.
- It gives you the chance to hear other students' ideas.
- It improves your listening skills.
- It increases your confidence in speaking.
- It can change your attitudes.

Leading a Discussion

- You may be in a seminar group that requires you to lead a group discussion, or lead a discussion after an oral presentation. You can demonstrate leadership by:
- introducing yourself and the members of the group
- stating the purpose of the discussion
- inviting quiet group members to speak
- being objective
- summarizing the discussion

Chairing a Group Discussion

- When chairing a discussion group you must communicate in a positive way to assist the speakers in accomplishing their objective. There are at least four leadership skills you can use to influence other people positively and help your group achieve its purpose. These skills include:
- introducing the topic and purpose of the discussion,
- making sure all members have approximately the same time, (i.e. no one dominates the discussion by taking too much time)
- thanking group members for their contribution
- being objective in summarizing the group's discussion and achievements.

Skills at the level of speaking

- **Impressive voice**
- **Proper pronunciation**
- **Proper articulation**
- **Poise of speech**
- **Effective body language**
- **Command over subject matter**
- **Appropriate approach**
- **Ask open ended questions**
- **Respect each other's opinion**
- **One voice at a time**
- **Say what you think**
- **Say why you think it**
- **Build on what others say**
- **Support and include each other**
- **Ask when you don't understand**
- **Try and reach agreement**
- **Be noise aware**

Skills at the level of listening

- Focused attitude
- Thorough perception
- Positive approach
- Respect each other's opinions
- Don't interrupt
- Listen carefully
- Detailed analysis
- Be open to new ideas
- Think about what others say
- Body language
- Listen for main ideas
- Ask questions
- Give feedback
- Proper hearing, understanding and judging

Evaluation sheet

- Name of the participant
- Aspects of evaluation
 - Extent and quality of contribution
 - Techniques used for discussion
 - Communication skills
 - Leadership qualities
 - Group behaviors
- Place, Date, Signature of evaluator

Advantages of GD

- Group is equipped with more complete information
- Every individual is unique, collects diversity of views
- Variety of straight solutions are collected
- New ideas and solutions are gathered
- Increases acceptability of solutions
- Its democratic in character
- It is heterogeneous
- Ensures safeguard of employees interest
- Maintains cordial relation of employer and employees
- Leads to the strengthening of the organization

Disadvantages

- Time consuming
- Difficult to fix responsibility
- Sometimes dominated by handful of members
- Unhappy compromises
- Social pressures
- Clashing demands
- Irrelevant discussions
- Expensive (time, money, man power, energy)