

Assessment Centres

Career Development

WHAT IS IT

This Guide is designed to help Undergraduates and Graduates deliver an excellent performance at an employer's Assessment Centre

WHY USE IT

This Guide will help:-

- Build your confidence
- Build your capability
- Build your capacity to deliver an excellent performance

It is recommended you read this Guide in conjunction with the Guide titled "Assessment Centre Preparation"

BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES

ASSESSMENT CENTRE

This Guide focuses on three key issues: -

- 1. Day of the Assessment Centre**
- 2. The Assessment Centre Itself**
- 3. Follow-up Actions - Post Assessment Centre**

1. Day of the Assessment Centre

The big day has arrived and whilst you may be a little apprehensive, with all your careful preparation you should be feeling very confident and well prepared for the day's events.

Your plans are in place, so try and avoid any last minute hitches and stay cool, calm and collected.

Over breakfast and on route to your interview, visualise yourself at the Assessment Centre confidently managing all the events and returning home with a big smile on your face in the knowledge that you have delivered an absolutely excellent performance.

Top Tips – for Day of the Assessment Centre

Before you leave home:

- Check rail or road conditions
- Check weather forecast – will you need a coat or umbrella?
- Review your checklist for the day which will include the following:

Double check your briefcase / folder for:

- CV - 2 copies (they may need a copy)
- 2 pens
- Contact details for the employer representative including direct telephone number
- Location address and postcode / zipcode
- Train ticket (unless driving)
- Map and directions
- GPS if driving
- Cash for car parks
- Credit card
- Snack and water
- Evidence of any work you may wish to show them

Check your appearance:

- Ask your friend or partner to 'look you over' for the final time

Plan your journey:

- Leave enough time to drive or take the train, in order to arrive in plenty of time.
- Motorways can be blocked and trains can be delayed, so aim to get to the town / area for your appointment at least 30 minutes before the start.

In the Reception area:

- Browse the Organisation's Newsletters or reports for useful information and latest news or explanation of 'In-house' acronyms which may be used to illustrate and emphasise your focused research.
- Visualise a successful day's events, smile to yourself and relax

2. The Assessment Centre Itself

A one or two day Assessment Centre is likely to follow a structure similar to that detailed below.

1. Welcome
2. Candidate Base,
3. Psychometric Exercises & Ability Tests
4. Simulation Exercises - such as Group Exercise, Role Play and Presentation
5. Interview
6. Two day Centres
7. Follow-up Actions

2.1 Welcome

This normally around 30 minutes and is most likely to include:-

- Overview of the complete assessment event and what key criteria is being measured
- Introduction to the panel of Assessors and Support Team
- Brief introduction by each candidate
- Issue of any additional promotional material about the Organisation's Career Opportunities
- Issue of a timetable of assessments for each Candidate for the one or two day event

- Explanation of each assessment event, room locations and where appropriate preparation periods
- Location of the 'rest area' or 'base camp' for use by Candidates in between assessment events
- Arrangements for refreshments and meals and overnight accommodation for two day events
- Any other administrative requirements

Listen very carefully to all the above information and identify and highlight the exact times and locations for your events to ensure you know exactly where you need to be and when. Ask questions about anything that is definitely unclear or ambiguous.

2.2 Candidate Base

The organiser of the Assessment Centre will arrange for a room or communal area to be set aside for all Candidates to relax in during the periods in between their individual assessment events. Supplies of refreshments will be located here and toilets will be close by.

2.3 Psychometric Assessments and Ability Tests

These types of assessments are normally undertaken on-line by candidates prior to the Assessment Centre event itself.

However in cases where this has not been so or the Organisation wants additional assessments undertaken then these will be scheduled into the day's itinerary. Please see the Guide "Assessment Centre Preparation" for how you should prepare yourself for these types of assessments. On the day ensure you clearly understand the timing for each assessment and you have sight of a clock or watch, but do not set an alarm as the organiser will have this responsibility.

2.4 Simulation Exercises - such as Group Exercise, Role Play and Presentation

Please see the Guide "Assessment Centre Preparation" for how you should prepare yourself for these types of assessments.

2.5 Interview

Your interview is most likely to have "an opening, middle and end" as explained below

"Opening" - Welcome and First impressions: - count for a lot. So take care to smile, listen, acknowledge you are following the discussion and generally communicate you are an OK person to work with! It takes a few minutes for a person to form a view, positive or negative, of another person when they meet for the first time. This means that the first impressions you create in the interviewer's mind are crucial. Thinking in advance what and how you will introduce yourself is therefore important. Focus on:

- Your handshake - firm and positive and look direct at each interview when shaking their hand
- Your voice - clear and positive
- Your mouth - smiling towards the interviewer(s)
- Your manner – be positive and attentive throughout the day
- Sit comfortably - in the chair the interviewer guides you to and place your CV and papers on the table
- Position your body - upright, open and facing towards the interviewer, relaxed and not stressed
- Build rapport - with the interviewer throughout the meeting

“Middle”- Interviewer’s Questions to You

This is one of the most important and hence the most substantive parts of the interview. You are recommended to have in front of you your CV to serve as an aide-mémoire and some blank paper to make notes.

The key to this part of the interview is:-

- **Listen** - to the question
- **Determine** - what is being asked for and therefore what is being measured
- **Respond** - accordingly with your prepared / planned answer.

This approach also applies to follow-up questions like –

- *‘what did you learn about yourself from that experience?’*
- *how would you tackle X differently next time in the light of your experience / learning?*

Similarly, it also applies to questions that you have not prepared answers for.

Follow the Interviewer's cues - to ensure you do not offend them in any way, i.e.

- Answer the question - concisely using the structure explained above
- Use humour - with caution, though a little light heartedness at intervals can help
- Monitor the Interviewer reactions - throughout, for example if they stop writing notes then you may be talking too fast or providing answers that are too long, or check to see if they need more detail.

“Middle”- Answering Your Questions

It is recommended you avoid asking questions about anything connected with:-

- salary - unless you are responding to a specific question
- conditions of employment
- very basic information that can easily be obtained from their website or career promotional material

See the Guide – Assessment Centre Preparation for suggested questions to ask.

“End” - Conclusion and Close

Having responded to your questions, the interviewer will normally close by confirming the next steps in the selection process including how and when you will be advised of the result of your interview. If they omit to tell you, then ask the question. Suggested parting statements from you may include the following:-

- Smile and thank the interviewers for their time, whilst shaking their hand
- Confirm that this discussion has reinforced your interest in joining them
- Confirm you look forward to hearing from them shortly or in line with their timescale

Collect your papers together, and follow the interviewer’s lead. They may stay in the interview room or simply ask you to return to the Candidate base area.

TOP TIPS – Interview Itself

Look right, sit right, feel right and you'll deliver an outstanding performance:

- Sit where the interviewer wants you
- Open your folder so you have your CV, Interview Notes, Job Spec to hand together with some blank paper and a pen
- Look relaxed but with 100% concentration

Listen and respond:

- Listen to each question, decide what the interviewer is MEASURING, respond with your prepared or most suitable answer

Know your answers:

- Know exactly where to glance at your CV or to remind yourself of your planned answers
- Use these for a quick reference, not prolonged, otherwise it may be too distracting for the Interviewer.

Monitor the Interview:

- Show enthusiasm in your answers and body language
- Hold back your emotions even if you have reservations about something that may be quite insignificant

Keep everything Positive:

- Be cautious about questions designed to reveal your weaknesses.
- Be cautious about talking about 'difficult periods or incidents. There may have been challenges but you dealt with them and learnt from them.
- Never criticise the actions or policies of an employer, manager or colleague
- Never argue with the interviewer or show any sign of being ruffled during the discussion

Two Day Assessment Centres

Some Organisations plan their Assessment Centres over more than one day though this tends not to be the trend these days due to higher costs. Nevertheless additional assessments can be introduced of the same type or different ones such as outdoor team based activities. In addition some organisations use the extended time for senior leaders to join the group in order to delivery presentations or just be available for open discussions in the bar or over dinner.

Overnight accommodation will be provided plus the opportunity for company representatives to 'socialise' with Candidates.

Whilst socialising occasions including meals may not essentially be part of the assessment process these occasions still represent occasions when the behaviour of Candidates can still influence Assessors and / or Senior Leaders.

So ensure you recognise these occasions as:-

- Opportunities to add to your image rather than detract from it
- Increase your knowledge of the Organisation and what it is like working for it
- Promote yourself as a sociable and polite individual
- As keen to listen to others as you are to promote your own views
- Definitely not the one that has too much to drink or could be accused of 'questionable behaviour' of any type.

3. Follow-up Actions - Post Assessment Centre

Learn from the Experience

Review the experience as soon as possible after the Assessment Centre and learn what you could possibly do differently next time to improve your performance even further. i.e. ask yourself: -

- What went well?
- What did not go as well as expected?
- How did you handle any unplanned questions?
- How do you think you handled the non-verbal communication aspects?
- What kind of rapport did you manage to establish with the interviewer?
- What did you learn from this experience and what will you do differently next time to improve your performance even further?

"Thank you" email

It is regarded as good etiquette by an increasing number of organisations for Candidates to email a thank you note after the Assessment Centre. Above all it provides you with an excellent opportunity to confirm your relevant expertise in response to key information obtained during the Centre.

Some of the most useful key information you could consider focusing on is the job's early priorities or projects. You can therefore use such information to confirm or remind them of your special capabilities in such areas. Your follow-up email should therefore:

- Thank the Interviewers for their time
- Be brief, just two or three short paragraphs should be sufficient
- Confirm the discussion re-enforced your continued interest in the organisation
- Remind them of your expertise relevant to one or two key issues raised during Centre

Golden Rules - for a Successful Assessment Centre

1. LISTEN TO THE QUESTIONS

- Decide what is the Interviewer trying to measure by the question
- If you are not sure about this then ask the Interviewer for clarification – i.e. do you mean x?
- Identify your best examples of achievements
- Avoid talking about any areas of weakness, but if this becomes unavoidable, respond honestly and concisely.

2. BE CONCISE

- Interviewers need to make notes, so avoid long complicated answers
- Giving concise and well structured answers will assist the interviewer's assessment of you
- If an answer has been too concise then the interviewer will ask for more detail
- It is better to be to concise than too verbose

3. AVOID ANYTHING NEGATIVE

- Try to respond with only positive information
- Try to see the positive side of potentially negative situations
- Do not criticise any individual or organisation
- Never introduce anything of a negative nature into an interview

NEXT STEPS

We trust that this Success Guide will assist your Career development and future success.

You may find some of our other Success Guides of value for your Personal or Career Development. For your convenience we list these below and you can access the index for these via the link below:-

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