

Assessment Centre Preparation

Career Development

WHAT IS IT

This Guide is designed to help Undergraduates and Graduates effectively prepare themselves for an employer's Assessment Centre and includes a range of "Top Tips".

WHY USE IT

This Guide has been created to provide you with very concise and focused information that in the opinion of the author represents best practice guidelines. As such the Guide will help you:-

- Make good use of your time
- Help you prepare for the Assessment Centre
- Help you maximise your chance of a successful result

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

BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES

ASSESSMENT CENTRE PREPARATION

Effective preparation for an Assessment Centre will always provide valuable payback so do not leave it too late and definitely not later than one week prior to your attendance.

The structure and content of an Assessment Centre for Graduate level candidates will vary according to the actual employer. However, many Assessment Centres have a one or two day structure and often include some or all of the following features:-

1. **Psychometric Exercises & Ability Tests**
2. **Simulation Exercises** - such as Group Exercise, Role Play and Presentation
3. **Interview** - including the questions you wish to ask

This Guide therefore first focuses on these three key features plus -

4. **Recommended Research**

1. **Psychometric Exercises & Ability Tests**

You are advised to review the web site for the major suppliers of these assessments. Suppliers will vary for each country but if in any doubt then review the very useful content at the SHL web site.

http://www.shldirect.com/example_questions.html

This site not only provides very helpful guidance on what to expect, but also provides examples of the type of questions asked by such assessments.

The more familiar you become with the style and content of these types of assessments and practise with some examples then the better your results are likely to be. The assessments required by the employer will either be conducted at the Assessment Centre itself or instructions will be provided by the employer for them to be completed on-line prior to the Assessment Centre.

2. Simulation Exercises

2.1 Presentations

Typically you will be asked to prepare a presentation on a specified subject or one of your own choosing using Microsoft Power-point and deliver this within a set timescale.

Top Tips – for Presentations.

- Prepare an Opening slide followed by
- An index slide showing a structure of “beginning, middle and end” (but not using these as headings)
- Limit your slides to no more than 6, preferably less for a 10 minute presentation
- Each slide should have a heading plus a limited number of bullet points
- Each bullet point should be around one line long and not be a sentence but a key point
- Be prepared to take questions at the end of your presentation.

2.2 Group Exercise

You are likely to be advised of the topic and timing on the day so there is a limit to what you can do in advance. The value of your assessment will depend directly upon your active listening and contribution during the exercise, but do not jeopardize your contribution by too much listening and too little contribution.

Top Tips - for Group Exercises

- Listen to the instructions given by the Assessment Centre Facilitator and follow these very carefully
- Listen to the views of everyone in the group
- Expect there to be competition to be leader of the group and there is merit on achieving this role
- Leadership roles also need to be maintained once achieved, but not at the expense of bullying
- Good value can also be obtained from actively supporting or opposing the leader depending on your specific views on the topic
- If there is more than one Group Exercise, do not try to be the leader twice but support someone else on the other occasion.
- Your performance is being assessed by observers throughout so do not delay and make your contribution from beginning to end of the exercise.
- Minimal contribution = Minimal amount to assess = minimal assessment points

2.3 Role Play Exercise

Once again you are likely to be advised of the topic, your role and timing on the day so there is a limit to what you can do in advance.

The value of your assessment will depend directly upon your active listening and contribution during the exercise.

Top Tips - for Role Play Exercise

- Listen carefully to the instructions for the exercise
- Make good use of any planning time provided to consider your proposed approach and alternative options in order to try and secure your objective

- Try and demonstrate some of the behaviours the employer has stated they are seeking from Graduates, so ensure you know what these behaviours are. Possible examples for Graduates might include: - flexibility, innovation, respect for people, leadership, results orientation.

3. The Interview

This section of the Guide focuses on your preparation for the following four types of interview questions plus questions you wish to ask and our suggested three 'Golden Rules' for interviews.

A. Biographical or Personal Questions.

B. Competency Questions

C. Probing Questions from the above

D. Unplanned Questions

Plus

E. Your Questions

A. Biographical or Personal Questions

If you do not have a significant employment history (as more mature student may have) then there is not too much to prepare for in advance. Prepare in advance and try to memorise your answers to the questions which are provided as examples and not an exhaustive list.

- Why do you want to join our organisation?
- What do you know about us?
- What specifically attracts you to our Graduate Training Scheme? or
- What specifically attracts you to the type of work you are applying for?
- Why did you choose the particular University and Course you selected?
- To what extent has the course lived up to your expectations?
- What have been the 'highs' and 'lows' of your time at University?
- What have been your main achievements, both academic and non-academic?
- Do you have any preferences for how you wish your career to develop?

B. Competency Questions

Competency based questions are designed to measure specific skills and behaviours and require you to provide specific examples of how you have demonstrated such skills or behaviours.

Organisations will either advise you in advance which competencies they will be measuring during the Assessment Centre or you may be able to identify them from their web site or promotional literature. If in any doubt then contact IIYC at enquiry@iyc.co.uk

You should then prepare your answers for each competency using your best example of an achievement that demonstrates each of these skills and/or behaviours. When preparing your answers follow this structure:-

Structure – try and structure your answer for each competency as concisely as possible Concise means not going into too much detail about how you achieved each specific achievement but focusing on the:-

- **Situation** - confirm the context of each achievement,
- **Action** - confirm what action YOU took - see note 1 below
- **Results** - confirm the measurable results - note 2 below

Top Tips - for Competency based Questions

- Listen to the Question
- Decide which competency the question is trying to measure
- Select the achievement that best illustrates this competency
- Give a concise answer using the “SAR” structure (Situation, Action, Result)
- Be prepared for follow-up questions like
 - “What did you learn from that experience?”
 - “If you did that again, what would you do differently?”
- Or further “probing” questions as explained below

C. Probing Questions (including Technical Questions) arising from the above

This type of question is designed to dig deeper into your expertise and achievements in order to make a more focused evaluation of your responses, areas of knowledge, skills or behaviours.

Top Tips - for Probing Questions

- These are very important questions
- These questions are designed to try and differentiate ‘good’ from ‘excellent’ candidates
- These questions are evaluating the depth, scope and value of your technical skills and knowledge
- These types of questions are critical to your success therefore prepare in advance

D. Unplanned Questions

You may be asked some questions for which you have not prepared answers in advance. Nevertheless, you can still be ready for such questions as our Top Tips illustrate below.

Top Tips - for Unplanned Questions

- Be ready for any type of questions during your interview
- Listen to the question and decide what is being measured
- If you do not understand the question ask for clarification
- If you still do not understand ask if it can be asked again later and you will respond then

E. Your Questions

Prepare up to 6 questions to ask at your interview but ensure you judge the situation on the day and be prepared to reduce or modify your questions in light of information obtained during the Assessment Centre.

Avoid asking about any of the following:-

- Issues where information is already provided by the employer on their web site or career literature. Though there can be exceptions to this guideline as example 2 below illustrates.

- Questions about terms and conditions of employment (ask about these prior to attendance)
- Closed Questions
- Questions about minor or relatively unimportant issues

The key to deciding which questions to ask is to try and select questions that:-

1. Provide you will useful additional information and
2. Lead to one or more of your areas of strength or to how your specific talents might add further value.

Example 1

“Can you give me an idea of what types of project or issues will be early priorities for the successful candidate?”

This question is clearly designed to obtain:-

- Additional information
- Information that you may be able to make use of on the spot“great just what I had hoped...”
- Information that you may be able to respond to later when you send a thank you email after the Assessment Centre and refer to ...“your talents in this specific areas”.
- The question is very positive and indicates you are thinking ahead.

Example 2

“I understand innovative thinking is important to the organisation but how do you encourage this?”

This question is useful as:-

- You are acknowledging you know this fact (or whatever alternative you select) is very important for the employer and are asking for additional information that could be useful.
- As it is so important normally the Interview will feel good and confident about their answer
- You may be able to focus on what you have to offer in this area in your follow-up email.

Example 3

“I know you encourage team work. How much opportunity is there likely to be to work in cross functional teams?”

This question is useful as:-

- Similar to example 2 above, but you are asking about an added dimension, i.e cross functional team work.
- It illustrates your particular interest in collaboration / team work and the particular value of cross functional collaboration.

4. Recommended Research

The quality of the research you undertake as part of your preparation is often directly related to your success. Research should therefore include the organisation itself, the actual opportunity and if possible your interviewer(s).

The Organisation

Limit research into your prospective employer to just the key facts to enable you to:-

- Lead the Interviewer to conclude you have a genuine interest in the organisation and the career opportunity you have selected given the 'key facts' you insert into your answers and perhaps the questions you ask.
- Satisfy yourself that your research has re-enforced your original interest in the organisation and that you know enough to cover the key facts.

The actual key facts you need to record will be influenced by the type of career for which you are being assessed and examples of these could include the following:-

Organisation's Values; Annual Sales Turnover; Number of employees; Key Services; Business areas; Key Products. Normally most of this information can be accessed from the organisation's website, or business updates, newspaper reports or Google.

The Actual Opportunity

Carefully review all the information provided by the organisation and make notes on:-

- Required knowledge, skills and behaviours
- Which of your strengths are aligned to these
- Issues you may wish to ask questions about

In addition you may wish to extend your research into your personal network by talking to individuals who are already employed by the Company, or who may know people who work there.

Your Interviewer(s)

It is quite unusual to be provided with the names of Interviewers in advance, however if they are provided then research them on '*LinkedIn*' and Google.

Look for anything that you appear to have in common such as the same University, hobbies, etc that can be useful in helping to understand their background and interests.

TOP TIPS – Research Preparation

- Good preparation is about being selective what you research
- Not overwhelming yourself with unnecessary information

Countdown to Success

TOP TIPS – Assessment Day minus 1 Week

Produce a checklist showing:

- All the actions you should take in the next week and items you must take to the Assessment Centre
- See suggestions below in "Top Tips – Assessment day"

Preparation:

- Prepare your answers in advance
- Complete your research into the organisation and your interviewer(s)
- Learn and practise your answers.

Reflect on previous interview experiences:

- What feedback have you received from a previous interview? What went well? What didn't go well?
- Which answers need to be adjusted in order to improve your performance on specific topics

Practice and Practice again:

- Practice your answers
- Pay special attention to your health and overall well-being, building in relaxation time

Clothing and appearance:

- Select suitable clothing etc

Build Your Confidence and Capability by:-

- Plan ahead and take time with careful preparation
- Memorise your answers to key question particularly competencies and why you are applying to X
- Do not try and memorise these 'word for word' but just as 'key points'
- "Practice makes perfect" so build your confidence with practice with a partner or friend
- The more familiar you are with your answers, the more confident and relaxed you will be

TOP TIPS for – Assessment Day – minus 1 Day

Review your checklist:

- Satisfy yourself you have everything ready for tomorrow
- Place everything you wish to take with you in a briefcase or bag

Plan your journey:

- Get your train ticket in advance, book a taxi, fill your car with fuel

Check rail or road conditions:

- Check weather forecast – will you need a coat or umbrella

Plan your tomorrow:

- So everything is covered and you avoid any panics, like not allowing enough time to do your hair etc

Your appearance:

- Ask your partner or a friend to 'look you over'

Rehearse your answers:

Relax:

- After your evening meal.
- Take a shower or bath and visualise yourself coming out of a very successful Assessment Centre
- Try to switch off, knowing that everything that needs to be prepared has been prepared, and is in place
- Go to bed and get a good night's sleep

GOOD LUCK

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:-

Related Success Guides

[CLICK HERE](#) to return to the Index for our Success Guides series and to access those of your choice.

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- Assessment Centre Guide
- Find Your First Job –Graduates
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- How to Job Search
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- Learning Buddy
- Mentoring
- Off the Job Development
- Personal Development
- Personal Development Plan
- Secondment
- Team Development
- Training Programme
- Visit Another Department

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