



An invitation to an organization's assessment center is the last stage in the recruitment process. It consists of a day or two days of activities undertaken with a group of other candidates. Assessors want to see candidates putting their skills into practice in a range of situations that are closer to the everyday reality of working life than the traditional job interview. This is what you need to know.





More and more graduating students are finding their interviewing activity conducted by an employer's assessment center. These centers assess candidates' skills in action. A range of tasks including group exercises, presentations, and social situations are used.

For many employers, the interviewing process starts at campus career fairs. Those that recruit on college campuses are serious about finding the very best talent, and you will be competing against candidates from colleges across the country and possibly from around the world. Interviewing has become a rigorous endurance test.

Typically, today's interview process goes something like this. Qualifying in each step allows you to proceed to the next.

- 1 Career fair interview (5-15 minutes)
- 2 Telephone interview to get more detail on your experience
- 3 Testing begins—personality testing, and logic and reasoning testing
- 4 Case study and interview
- 5 Group activity with interviews
- 6 Group and Panel Interviews

The first four steps can happen in a matter of days. However, the overall process can include 7 interviews and take up to 2 months.

This handbook will help guide you through Steps 3 through 6. The information was gathered with the help of More Than A Resumé clients who have experienced assessment center interviews first-hand. After reading this handbook, you will know what to expect and can prepare for interviews accordingly.

A special thanks to Stephen Ong. Stephen will graduate this spring from the University of Illinois and successfully survived the assessment center interview. He accepted a position in the Anheuser-Busch/InBev Brewery Management Program.

TABLE OF CONTENTS



For information on career fairs, interviewing and other helpful tips to navigate the job search process, visit www.morethanaresume.com and graduation-nation.com.

Jane Horowitz has championed college students in their job search from colleges and universities across the country, and with majors from engineering to fine arts, from computer design to banking. Jane has made a measurable and lasting difference in college students' lives.



Personality testing is the part of interviewing that candidates dread the most because of what the test might reveal. These tests measure your personality traits, behavioral style, opinions and motivators associated with successful performance in the job. For example, whether you prefer working in a group or independently, whether you prefer taking charge over situations or following others. Personality tests also measure personal attributes, such as temperament, career interests and personal values.

Employers use personality testing to determine if **you are a good fit for the job and the job is a good fit for you.** Your personality traits and behavioral style have a significant role to play in determining fit.

Personality tests help to evaluate how you are likely to handle relevant work-related activities, such as working in teams, complying with policy and procedures, solving problems in a practical manner, leading others, coping with stress and pressure, and more.

Employers are seeking candidates with personality traits which they have determined match the job requirements.

- Candidates for HR professional roles are likely to be required to demonstrate effective communication skills, a structured and planned approach to tasks, etc.
- Candidates for engineering roles are likely to be required to demonstrate an analytical and fact-based approach to work, and ability to cope with pressure in the workplace.
- Candidates for sales roles are likely to be required to exhibit a competitive nature, high motivation to achieve results, and the ability to initiate and close sales.

There are no right or wrong answers in personality testing. There is also no positive or negative personality.

Can you prepare for personality tests?

Only in the sense that it's important for you to understand the job requirements and how these align with your personality traits to perform in the job. However, there are no right or wrong answers in personality testing. There is also no positive or negative personality. Your personality is measured based on its suitability to the job requirements.

You can't fake a personality test.

Your personality traits and behavioral style are measured through a self-report personality questionnaire. Most personality questionnaires have a built-in validity scale (detects attempts to misrepresent yourself) and asks you through covert questions (reading the question doesn't reveal what it measures) about aspects of your own personality which are relevant to the workplace. For example, your response to a question about how you behave in a party can indicate your ability to work in teams. The information collected on you is collated into what becomes known as your "personality profile."

Personality tests are different from aptitude tests.

- Aptitude tests measure your ability to acquire a skill or do a particular type of work.
- Personality tests are used to determine your type of personality, your values, interests and your skills.

Your responses to questions in the personality test allow potential employers to make predictions about how you will respond across a range of vastly different work-related activities.

Personality tests range from the five-minute Color Quiz which is supposed to determine your personality type by the colors you select, to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator which is one of the top-rated personality tests that helps assess your personality type and helps to explore career options. (I'm an INTP.) Many college career services and career coaches administer these tests.



Case study interviews are designed to scrutinize the skills that are especially important in the workplace, and are used to determine if you can do the real work at hand.

But, even if you've become a pro at case study analysis, as many business students are, the thought of doing so within a tight time-frame in the already highly pressured situation of a job interview can be daunting—if not downright terrifying.

Employers conduct case study interviews in one of two ways. You have a telephone interview with a case study interviewer and then receive a link to an online platform where you will find a case to solve. Or, the case study interview is held at a campus location where you meet with the interviewer at a designated time to receive the case study.

In both situations you have:

- 30 minutes to read the case study (average 15 pages) and prepare your solution/recommendation.
- 7 minutes to present, often using a flip chart.
- Followed by a 10-minute question and answer session specific to your presentation.

Contrary to what you've heard, **there are no right or wrong answers**. There are no predetermined answers in case study interviews. The interviewers are interested in learning about your time management; quantitative, analytical and critical thinking skills; problem-solving abilities; creativity; flexibility; communication skills and powers of persuasion; ability to think quickly under pressure; listening skills; business acumen; ability to synthesize findings; and to act professionally. **It's about your approach and presentation, not the answer.** How could you possibly get to a right answer in 30 minutes?

In other words, the interviewer is evaluating you on your intuitive, natural judgment in a business setting. Bain says it this way:

"Someone whose answer is strategically closer to a "right" answer—but who arrived at it with superficial insight and a flimsy rationale—will not do as well as someone whose answer might be more off the mark because they don't have the business background, but whose thinking is cogent and well supported. We look for intrinsic mental agility and curiosity in our hires, knowing we will apprentice, train, and coach them with content and knowledge."

That's right. Companies hire for attitude and train for skills.

CASE STUDY TIPS

- **Read carefully.** What is the problem you are asked to solve? Put aside facts/slides/diagrams that seem less important. There may be several.
- **Be concise.** Have your key messages outlined in your handwritten summary/flip chart. Save the details for your discussion.
- **Do the math.** Figure out what analytics are necessary for your recommendation and piece together the required data from the slides.
- **Construct a logical, defensible recommendation and argument.** Craft a recommendation that can actually be implemented by the client.
- **Consider both sides.** Strengthen the rationale behind your recommendation by working through the strongest arguments against it.

Q&A SESSION TIPS

- **Make it a business discussion, not an interview.** Engage in a thoughtful and insightful *conversation* with the interviewer to demonstrate your business judgment, and to learn as much as you can about the company's approach to problem-solving.
- **Maintain eye-contact.** Eye contact will help you engage the interviewer, establish rapport, and contribute to the interactivity of the interview.
- **Listen.** Make sure you understand the question that is asked. Remember it's not about the right answer. It's about your thought process and ability to communicate.
- **Demonstrate your communication and people skills.** Project your confidence, energy and interest. The case interview is an opportunity to demonstrate not only your skills, but also how you might interact with future clients and colleagues.



The group activity is used to see your communication and problem-solving skills in action, and to ensure that you can work effectively in a team. The best way to impress the employers is to show yourself as a good team player —flexible, full of ideas, but willing to listen to and help expand the ideas of others.

The group activity day is structured, although it might not always seem that way. It's important to remember the assessors (recruiters, senior managers, recent grad hires) are trying to get an idea of how you would fit into the workplace. Be friendly and professional—just the way you would be in the office if you got the job.

The group activity is likely to consist of some combination of the following, in which you are observed.

- Social time.
- Group exercise—such as discussing an issue, constructing something, or analyzing a complex business case study—and presenting the team findings; or, a combination of these activities.

TIPS ON SKILLS TO DEMONSTRATE IN THE GROUP EXERCISE

- **You need to contribute, but not to dominate.** Be assertive, but not aggressive. If you are aware that you are usually a shy person who does not speak up, do your best to participate. If you know that you can sometimes be overbearing in groups, hold that tendency in check.
- **Speak clearly and confidently.** Listen and don't interrupt. Be aware of what others in the group are contributing. You could try to draw out quieter members and seek their views. This shows you are an effective leader.
- **Be diplomatic.** If one person is behaving in a dominant way, don't shout them down, but try to make sure that everybody gets a chance to share their thoughts. Be prepared to compromise.
- **Keep an eye on the time** and stay focused on the overall objective. From time to time, try to summarize the group's progress.

GROUP ACTIVITIES

The group case study exercise

In this type of exercise, the group is given a set period of time to work together to respond to a case study brief, and the group presents its findings as part of the exercise. Sometimes each candidate is given a different briefing document or role to play, and the group has to reach a conclusion despite the conflicting views of its members.

The discussion group

A discussion group involves the group members sitting in a circle and given a topic(s) to discuss. The nature of the topics can vary, but usually they involve an issue of current importance to students or something that's been in the news recently. At the end of the discussion, each candidate may be invited to comment briefly in turn on one of the group's conclusions, so it's vital to listen as well as to speak up.

The leaderless task

This often involves constructing something. As a group you must come up with a solution within the time limit. No one in the group is designated as the leader, and so each participant finds their role on the team.

- **A good leader delegates.** The task cannot be done by you alone. You must divide up the work among the others.
- **A good leader uses the strengths of others.** You must identify the strengths of the individuals in your group and use them in appropriate ways.





The ice-breaker

Ice-breakers help you relax and help the group to gel. Sometimes they are practical and involve the completion of a task within a tight deadline, or they might be more intellectual. Everyone is expected to play a part and share information.

DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS

Expect some debriefing-type questions. These group interview questions will most likely be asked in a group situation after the team exercises have been completed.

- **What made this team work successfully?** Refer to aspects such as the good use of available resources, the management of obstacles, successful team communication, use of initiative, and support and encouragement of each other. Focus on the approach the team took and acknowledge the contributions of individual members.
- **What was your personal contribution to the team's performance?** Refer to your strengths such as planning and organizing, analyzing and problem-solving. Support your answer with specific examples of how you used these strengths to contribute to the team. What special role did you play and how was your contribution received by the team?
- **Why did this team struggle to accomplish the objective?** Refer to the reasons why things did not go according to plan, and give specific examples. Demonstrate that you have been able to realistically analyze the situation and explain what you would have done, with hindsight, to improve the situation and deal with the problems the team

experienced. Show an ability to offer solutions, not just to point out the problems. Never point a finger at a team member.

- **How did you deal with the stress created by meeting the challenges?** Describe the specific steps you took to remain calm and controlled. Focus on skills such as planning, flexibility, communication and discipline.
- **How would the other team members describe you?** Refer to the positive reactions you experienced from other team members. Support your perception of how you came across with examples of observations or remarks made by the team.





The challenge in a group interview is to find the right balance between getting your opinions across and dominating the conversation. You also don't want to be perceived as being passive or shy. Be confident and don't let yourself be bullied by others into staying quiet. At the same time, encourage your fellow interviewees to speak up and let their ideas be heard. Let your knowledge and confidence speak for itself.

Group interviews have two purposes:

- 1 Because teamwork is becoming more critical in the workplace, interviewers see how you perform against other equally qualified candidates.
- 2 Interviewers see how you perform under pressure and rapid fire questioning that simulates meeting and presenting behavior.

Group interviews are conducted by a panel of interviewers. When there is more than one person doing the interviewing, the chances of a bad hiring decision being made are reduced.

In group interviews, the interviewers look for the same skills as in one-to-one interviews. They want to see a strong candidate who knows how to work well with others, and behaves properly and competently in a work environment.

Specific things that group interviewers scrutinize:

- **Presentation skills.** Interviewers will be paying special attention to how you present yourself vs. the others in the group.
- **Communication skills.** Group interviewers look for your ability to listen, follow instructions, and get your ideas across to them and the other candidates in the group. You might also be tested to see how you receive and give feedback/criticism.
- **Interest level.** From the time the interview starts until it ends, interviewers will be trying to assess how interested you are in the job you are applying for vs. the others in the group.
- **Appearance.** Not your clothing, but your body language. Do you appear confident? Cooperative? Professional? Do you slouch or fidget? Do you make eye contact when you talk? Are you able to engage everyone on the panel when one interviewer asked the question?

In a group interview, interpersonal dynamics get complicated. You have to assess and respond to a variety of personalities. This can seem overwhelming, but if you follow a few rules, you will be able to nail that group interview and get the job.

- **Remember that different personalities make up a team.** You're going to always find at least one really happy person on the panel, at least one really serious person on the panel, and one or more who seem to not really have an interest in being there. You shouldn't try to alter your style to suit them all. When you do, you look like you have multiple personalities—and that won't get you hired.
- **Don't forget that everyone in that room is equally important.** While some may have bigger titles, or more relevant roles, they all should be treated the same. When you answer questions, make eye contact with each one as a way to say, "You are a team and I intend to treat you all with the same level of respect."
- **Keep in mind that they are part of a tribe you want to join.** It's important that you make the case throughout the interview that you respect and admire the team, but that you are also confident you bring something to them that they need. It's on you to prove that you'd be a valuable asset to the organization. By tying in examples of how your efforts would help each person on the panel, you will show that you plan to use your skills and abilities to every team member's benefit. In short, you can be of value to each panel member—and that makes you the one they should want to hire.

Be prepared to answer the following:

Why should I hire you over the other candidates in the room; or said differently, why are you the better candidate?



ETIQUETTE TIPS TO HELP NAVIGATE A GROUP INTERVIEW.

- Before you begin the interview, introduce yourself politely to the other candidates.
- Get the names of the other candidates. You might be wearing name tags, but if you are lined up opposite the interviewers you won't be able to read the tag. **Refer to people by name.** It helps to make a seating chart of everyone in the room.
- When you walk into the meeting room, **greet all of your interviewers individually.** Make eye contact, say hello, and if possible shake hands.
- Keep your **answers to :30 or :60** otherwise you appear to be trying to dominate the interview.
- It is important to be seen as a leader and as an active participant, rather than merely an observer. You do not want to blend in with the others but you also do not want to dominate. So it's important to **allow the others to speak. And do not speak over them.**
- Contribute your views and ideas while also listening to the other candidates. If there is an opportunity, **give praise when possible** and acknowledge valuable contributions from other candidates, and do so by name.
- With many candidates all trying to contribute, someone may make your point first. If this happens, think of a statement that adds to this point. ***"To build on Joe's point..."*** If you have a significantly different point-of-view, think of a way to address the question without attacking or embarrassing the person, ***"Joe makes a good point, from my experience..."*** This demonstrates that you listen actively and think on your feet.
- **Don't focus on any one individual.** You should make an effort to engage everyone in the group when you are asking or answering questions.

When you answer a question, 60% of the time you should look at the individual who asked the question.

- **Prepare meaningful questions to ask.** You will be asked at some point if you have any questions and you will stand out from the other candidates if you have a list of insightful questions for the interviewers.
- **Thank everyone** who interviewed you, and remember names and titles so that you can send a written thank you note afterwards.

GROUP & PANEL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview questions designed to get to know you as an individual may be asked on a one-to-one basis during the group interview process.

- **How would you describe yourself?** Avoid just repeating what is on your resumé. Try to set yourself apart from the other candidates as the most suitable person for the job. You need to think about the job requirements and emphasize your fit with these needs. You can mention observations others have made about your strengths and abilities to reinforce your answer.
- **How would your colleagues describe you?** Think about the interpersonal style you use with your peers.
- **What about this position appeals to you most?** Give specific examples of why this position and company excite you. Refer to the positives you have learned about the organization and the job from the interview process.
- **What are your goals, and how does this company and job fit with these goals?** Tailor your goals to the realities of this position and company. Do not offer specific job titles. Focus on types of experiences you hope to gain and the skills you want to develop.
- **What would you bring to this position?** Refer to your key skills and abilities, and how you would use them in the job. Avoid general statements like, *"I am a team-player."* Instead, be prepared to refer to specific evidence.