

## HOW TO HANDLE GROUP DISCUSSIONS

### How to Handle Group Discussions

Many companies conduct group discussion after the written test so as to check on your interactive skills and how good you are at communicating with other people. The GD is to check how you behave, participate and contribute in a group, how much importance do you give to the group objective as well as your own, how well do you listen to viewpoints of others and how open-minded are you in accepting views contrary to your own. The aspects which make up a GD are verbal communication, non-verbal behaviour, conformation to norms, decision-making ability and cooperation. You should try to be as true as possible to these aspects.

### General Tips for Group Discussion

A good level of general awareness will come in handy so that you aren't at a loss of words on certain issues. Understand the topic and analyse it mentally before speaking. Be clear about the purpose and content of your viewpoint.

One should be able to communicate his views in an effective manner to everyone. Be clear in speech, audible but not too loud and above all remain confident.

Remember the six C's of effective communication -- Clarity, Completeness, Conciseness, Confidence, Correctness and Courtesy. You should maintain eye contact with all others in the group and not focus on a particular person for he may benefit from that. Be responsive to ideas from other people and seem to be very receptive and open-minded but don't allow others to change your own viewpoint..

Starting the discussion is considered to be good however it isn't that important; what is important is that you speak for a period long enough for you to be able to communicate your viewpoint. Always maintain your calm and never get aggressive. If you haven't been able to talk then one can cut in saying "Excuse me, but what I think is ....." or something of that sort.

Never lose your temper and never attack anyone on a personal front.

Your attitude should be one of cooperation and not one of conflict.

Don't lose sight of the goal of the discussion.

Listen to any criticisms and give them a thought before trying to defend your views.

### How is Evaluation Done in a Group Discussion

Winners' skills Group discussion is an important dimension of the selection process. Any institute requires students to work with others for effective functioning. Therefore, people skills are an important aspect of any MBA program.

In today's context, the educational institutes and organizations are interested in team players rather than individual contributors. During the Group Discussion, the panel essentially evaluates the candidate's potential to be a leader and also his/her ability to work in teams. Remember that institutes are typically on the look out for candidates who will inspire to lead and succeed and for that you need to be a good team player.

Here is a sample list of skills assessed during a group discussion:

#### Leadership skills:

Ability to take leadership roles and ability to lead, inspire and carry the team along to help them achieve group's objectives.

Example: To be able to initiate the group discussion, or to be able to guide the group especially when the discussion begins losing relevance or try to encourage all members to participate in the

discussion.

Communication skills:

The participating candidates will be assessed in terms of clarity of thought, expression and aptness of language. One key aspect is listening. It indicates a willingness to accommodate others views.

Example: To be able to use simple language and explain concepts clearly so that it is easily understood by all. You actually get negative marks for using esoteric jargons in an attempt to show-off your knowledge.

Interpersonal skills:

Is reflected in the ability of the individual to interact with other members of the group in a brief situation. Emotional maturity and balance promotes good interpersonal relationships. The person has to be more people centric and less self-centered.

Example: To remain cool even when someone provokes you by with personal comment, ability to remain objective, ability to empathize, non-threatening and more of a team player.

Persuasive skills:

Ability to analyze and persuade others to see the problem from multiple perspectives without hurting the group members.

Example: While appreciating someone else's point of view, you should be able to effectively communicate your view without overtly hurting the other person.

Problem solving skills:

Ability to come out with divergent and offbeat solutions and use one's own creativity.

Example: While thinking of solutions, don't be afraid to think of novel solutions. This is a high- risk high-return strategy.

Conceptualizing skills:

The ability to grasp the situation, take it from the day to day mundane problem level and apply it to a macro level.

Example: At the end of the discussion, you could probably summarize the findings in a few sentences that present the overall perspective. Don't be disheartened if you don't make it after your first group discussion. The best possible preparation for a group discussion is to learn from one's past mistakes...

**Frequently Asked Questions / Doubts on GD**

What is the normal duration of a GD?

A GD is generally of 15-20 minutes duration.

How many panel members are there to evaluate?

There are usually 3-4 panel members to evaluate.

Is there time given for preparation after the topic is given and before starting the GD?

Usually some time (2-5 minutes) is given to collect one's thoughts, but there could be instances when this does not happen, so it is best not to bank on this.

Should I address the panel or the group members?

Don't ever make the mistake of addressing the panel members. The GD is between you and the other members, not the panel members. You must avoid even looking at the panel members while the GD is in progress. Just ignore their existence.

What is the seating arrangement like?

It could be semi-circular, or circular, or seating along side a rectangular table, depending upon the

venue. It is best not to bother about trivial issues like this, which you have no control over.

How should I address the other group members?

If you are initiating the discussion, you could do so by collectively addressing the group as "Friends". Subsequently, you could use names (if the group has had a round of self-introduction prior to starting the discussion and you remember the names) or simply use pronouns like "he" or "she".

Suppose I have a lot to say on the topic, should I say all of it?

You would not be looked upon favourably if you kept speaking all the time and did not listen to anyone else. Contrary to the misconception, the person who talks the most is not necessarily the one who is judged the best. The quality and not the quantity of your contribution is the success factor.

Should I encourage others to speak up?

Do not directly put someone who is consistently silent on the spot by asking him/her to speak up. If someone has been trying to speak and has a good point but is cut off constantly, you may encourage him/her to continue with her point as you would like to hear her out.

Are the group members supposed to keep track of the time or will the panel keep track?

It would be good if you are conscious of the time, but not to the point of getting so distracted looking at your watch that you do not contribute to the discussion.

### **Dos & Donts of Group Discussion**

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. Think of what you are going to say.

Seek clarification if you have any doubts regarding the subject.

Don't start speaking until you have clearly understood and analyzed the subject.

Work out various strategies to help you make an entry: initiate the discussion or agree with someone else's point and then move onto express your views.

Opening the discussion is not the only way of gaining attention and recognition. If you do not give valuable insights during the discussion, 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 extent 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.

Don't lose your cool if anyone says anything you object to. The key is to stay objective: Don't take the discussion personally.

Always be polite: Try to avoid using extreme phrases like: 'I strongly object' or 'I disagree'. Instead try phrases like: 'I would like to share my views on...' or 'One difference between your point and mine...' or "I beg to differ with you"

Brush up on your leadership skills; motivate the other members of the team to speak (this surely does not mean that the only thing that you do in the GD is to say "let us hear what the young lady with the blue scarf has to say," or "Raghu, let us hear your views" - Essentially be subtle), and listen to their views. Be receptive to others' opinions and do not be abrasive or aggressive.

If you have a group of like-minded friends, you can have a mock group discussion where you can learn from each other through giving and receiving feedback.

Apart from the above points, the panel will also judge team members for their alertness and presence of mind, problem-solving abilities, ability to work as a team without alienating certain members, and creativity

### **Common Mistakes in a Group Discussion**

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 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.

#### 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 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.
- \* Facts and figures need not validate all your statements.
- \* Its 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 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.

#### **Probable GD Topics**

1. US war on Iraq-justified or not.
2. Role of UN in peacekeeping.
3. Position of Women in India compared to other nations.
4. Environment Management.
5. Is China better than India in software.
6. Should SONIA gandhi be made the PM
7. BPOs in INDIA
8. Govt contribution to IT
9. Will punch lines rule the Advt
10. Prematual sex
11. Is China a threat to Indian industry
12. India or West , which is the land of opportunities
13. Water resources should be nationalised
14. Balance between Professionalism & Family

15. Effect of cinema on Youth
16. Education in India compared to Foreign nations
17. Is it necessary to ban COCOCOLA in India.
18. What is the effect of movies on youth.(is it good or bad)
19. Are studies more benifitial in India or in Abroad.
- 20.UN's peace activities and America's war on Iraq.
- 21.Environment-Whose Responisibility.
- 22.Is China a threat to the indian software industry.
- 23.Role of UN in Peace keeping
- 24.War on Iraq
- 25.About Hockey being the primary game in India.
- 26.Can America occupy Iraq
- 27.Cricket should be banned or not.
- 28.Is China a threat to India
- 29.Present state of Indian Cricket team.
- 30.Love marriage/Arranged marriage.
- 31.Advantages of Co-education.

#### **Hot GD Topics**

- 1.How to deal with international terrorism.
- 2.Should we pursue our policy of dialogue with Pakistan?
- 3.Is peace and non-violence outdated concepts?
- 4.Are Mobile Phones Boon or Bane?
- 5.Love Marriage vs Arranged Marriage