

## Assessment methods

Ensuring that the right people are in the right jobs is important both to employers and their employees. When decisions are made about recruitment, promotion or professional development, the assessment of people's personal strengths and limitations is an essential stage. The most common form of assessment is an interview, but increasingly you can expect to come across a combination of different assessment methods alongside, or instead of, a traditional interview.

### WHY ARE MULTIPLE ASSESSMENT METHODS USED?

- They provide a more comprehensive overview of an individual's strengths and limitations than any single method.
- They are standardised, so that everyone who takes part in the same exercise has the same opportunity to demonstrate their skills and abilities.
- They are more objective than an interview alone, which can depend on the interviewer's interpretation.
- They allow you to show a range of your abilities in a variety of different situations, your performance on all the different exercises is taken into account in the assessment.
- Feedback on your performance helps you to understand your own strengths and development needs, to identify goals and action plans for the future.

### WHAT MIGHT I EXPECT FROM SUCH ASSESSMENTS?

- You may be assessed individually, or with a group of other participants, in which case the whole procedure is often called an [Assessment Centre](#).
- You may be interviewed or observed by more than one assessor.
- Exercises can broadly be divided into those which are completed individually and those which involve interaction with assessors or other candidates.
- You will probably be required to participate in a number of different exercises, although exactly how many and of what type will vary depending on the job, the organisation and the aims of the assessment.

### INDIVIDUAL EXERCISES

- **In-trays or e-Trays**
  - In-tray/e-tray exercises involve working from the contents of a manager's in-tray or email in-box, which typically consists of emails, memos and background information. You may be asked to deal with paperwork and make decisions, balancing the volume of work against a tight schedule. For example, you are asked to take over the role of Public Relations Manager of a company who are organising a stand at an exhibition. Your tasks are based around organising the stand, touching on issues such as personnel, finance and marketing.
- **Aptitude tests**
  - These are typically timed, multiple choice, paper-and-pencil/computer based tests, which assess your ability to interpret or reason with various types of information. The types of tests will vary depending on the nature of the job, but might include tests of verbal or numerical reasoning, or of your ability to follow logical instructions or sequences of diagrams.



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For example, you are given short passages of information, and asked to evaluate statements in the light of the information in the passages, deciding whether they are true or untrue, or you cannot say without further information.

### **Tests of productive thinking**

These tests look at the volume, diversity and originality of your ideas. You are presented with open-ended questions relating to various problems and situations, and asked to generate responses within a time limit. For example: You are given a scenario in which shop floor workers in a factory have expressed low job satisfaction, and staff turnover is high. You are asked to generate as many ideas as you can of ways to increase staff morale within a limited budget.

### **“Self-Report” questionnaires: Personality, Motivation and Interests**

You may be asked to complete one or more “self-report” questionnaires. These are not concerned with your abilities, but look at how you see yourself in terms of your personality, motivation or interests. There are no time limits or right or wrong answers, and you should always respond frankly and honestly, not as you think the assessor would want you to, or as you would like to be. For example: A personality questionnaire may ask about your preferred style of behaving at work, in terms of the way you relate to others, the way you approach and solve problems, and your feelings and emotions. Motivation questionnaires look at the energy with which you approach your work, and the different conditions, which increase or decrease your motivation. Interest inventories ask you to decide how much you like carrying out various types of activities at work.

## INTERACTIVE EXERCISES

### **Group exercises**

Group exercises are timed discussions, where a group of participants work together to tackle a work-related problem. You are observed by assessors, who are not looking for right or wrong answers, but for how you interact with your colleagues in the team. For example: You role-play a member of the marketing team for a pharmaceutical company. The team is required to discuss the launch of a new consumer product, covering issues such as advertising, ethical concerns, and packaging and pricing.

### **Interviews**

An interview of some sort forms part of most assessments, although the format may vary. Traditional interviews will probably cover education and training, work history and interests. In a structured interview you may be asked about examples of situations when you have demonstrated particular skills, or about how you would approach specific problems. For example: You are asked to give an example, and talk about an occasion when you have organised the work of a team.



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### **Presentations**

You may be required to make formal presentation to a number of assessors. In some cases this will mean preparing a presentation in advance on a given topic. In other cases, you may be asked to interpret and analyse given information, and present a case to support a decision. For example: You are asked to make a decision about the proposed relocation of the head office of an electronics equipment manufacturer. You present your recommendations, fully explaining the reasoning, and are then questioned by the assessor about your decision.

### **Fact-finding exercises**

In a fact-finding exercise you may be asked to reach a decision starting from only partial knowledge. Your task is to decide what additional information you need to make a decision, and sometimes also to question the assessor to obtain this information. For example: You take on the role of a Regional Manager in a holiday company, dealing with a customer complaint. You are asked to decide what further information you need in order to reach a decision, and have a time limit in which you can question the assessor to obtain this information, before presenting your fully reasoned argument.

## SOME USEFUL HINTS

### **Before the assessment**

- Know yourself; draw up a list of your strengths and limitations in relation to the job. Ensure that you can describe yourself and your experiences in and out of work. Think about the type of skills those descriptions illustrate, and be prepared to draw on examples.
- Think about your objectives; in selection, make sure you are familiar with the responsibilities and conditions of the post you are applying for, as well as some background information. In development, think about what you hope to achieve from the assessment, and what sort of issues you would like to see addressed. Have your own questions ready in advance.

### **During the assessment**

- Listen carefully to the instructions you are given, and ask if you are unsure about what you have to do. Assessors will be looking to see how you perform on the exercises themselves, rather than how well you have understood the instructions.
- Be alert and aware throughout the assessment, and recognise your non-verbal signals, such as eye contact, facial expression, and gestures.
- Don't make assumptions about the way you should respond. If you try to guess what the assessors are looking for, you may be wrong. It is usually best to be yourself, and respond honestly.



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### After the assessment

- Multiple assessment exercises are often challenging and you should expect to feel fairly stretched by the end of your assessment.
- You will be taking part in more than one exercise, so there are plenty of opportunities to show what you can do. If you feel you have done poorly on one exercise, don't give up; your performance on all of them will be taken into account.
- Try not to judge your own performance in relation to the other participants. You should be assessed on your own merit so you will gain no advantage by attempting to compete with others. Similarly, try not to let other participants intimidate you or make you anxious.
- In development, you should receive detailed information about your performance, which can be used to help you develop action plans. In selection situations too, many organisations will offer you feedback, regardless of whether or not you are successful. This may give insight into your strengths/limitations, and may prove useful for future selection procedures; so if feedback is not offered, ask if it is available.