

Interview tests and exercises

Psychometric tests

Psychometric tests are structured methods used by employers to assess each candidate's suitability for a job or programme. They may include aptitude or ability tests, personality questionnaires or a combination of both. Psychometric testing is usually one part of a multi-stage recruitment process.

You can learn more from the [Psychological Testing Centre](#) (British Psychological Society).

Aptitude/ability tests

These are formal tests, completed online or on a printed answer sheet. They are designed to test your reasoning and cognitive capability, usually to a strict deadline. Each test is generally comprised of multiple choice questions. You will be given instructions before you start and there will be some example questions to try with no time limit.

Online tests are often used as an early selection method. You will usually be asked to sit a similar test in person, should you progress to a later stage of assessment or selection.

If you have special requirements it is advisable to declare this beforehand. The organisation may be able to make adjustments, allow you extra time or grade your results more appropriately.

The tests most commonly used in graduate recruitment are:

- verbal tests - such as verbal reasoning, analysis and word sort;
- numerical tests - such as reasoning, analysis and sequential tests;
- diagrammatic and spatial reasoning - testing your sense of logic and visual thinking and organisation skills;
- specific tests - for example syntax for computer programming, data checking or mechanics.

To get the best out of the test:

- call to see if they will tell you broadly what types of test you will have to complete if the employer has not given any information;
- try as many practice exercises as possible using the resources below and any that your careers service has to offer;
- work as quickly and as accurately as you can;
- if you get stuck on a question, move on and come back to it later if you have time (although be aware that often you cannot go backwards in an online test);
- you must often make a sacrifice between speed and accuracy - recruiters may deduct marks for incorrect answers.

Practice aptitude tests

There are a range of links below to practice tests. Most have free examples. Some may incur a small charge to use:

- [Aptitude Tests Online](#)
- [Cubiks Online Assessment](#)
- [Kenexa Practice Tests](#)
- [Morrisby](#)
- [Psychometric Advantage](#)
- [Psychometric Success](#)
- [Saville Consulting](#)
- [SHLDirect.com](#)
- [University of Kent Psychometric Test Resource](#)

Practice aptitude tests may also be available at specific employer websites, such as JP Morgan, HSBC, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Proctor & Gamble and the Civil Service.

Personality questionnaires

These are not tests but indicators of your personality type. They may have a time limit for completion. There are no right or wrong answers; the questionnaire is intended to give the employer a profile of your interests and your working style.

Usually you will be asked a set of questions or be given a series of statements or options to choose between. You may feel that you are being presented with the same questions or options in different ways over and over again. This is to establish consistency in your responses to get a more accurate indication of your preferences.

Some guidelines for approaching personality questionnaires:

- try out some questionnaires in advance using the links below. They may not be exactly what the selector will use but will give you practice in doing them;
- answer each question in relaxed manner;
- be yourself - avoid trying to predict what would be a good or bad response. Go with your gut instinct and answer honestly;
- if any question or option confuses you don't agonise over it - move on to the next selection and come back to it later if you have time.

Practice personality assessment sites include:

- [Keirsey Temperament Sorter](#)
- [Team technology](#)
- [Finding Potential](#)
- [People Maps](#)

Presentations

Designing and delivering a presentation may be part of the selection process. You may be told the topic in advance, be asked to select your own or be given a topic on the day and a little time to prepare it.

Preparation and research

- Find out what format the presentation may take, what technology and materials will be available to you and how long you will have.
- Establish who the audience will be - if it will just be the selectors or if other candidates will also attend.
- Unless instructed to use PowerPoint or other visual aids consider the strength of a verbal-only presentation.
- Practice your presentation - ideally in front of a careers adviser or just someone who can offer constructive criticism and help you to sharpen your performance.
- Try to become comfortable with whatever visual aids you are using.

Design

- If you have a free choice of topic choose a subject you know well - you will be asked questions about your presentation.
- Think about what you will do to keep the audience's attention. Pitch the content at a level appropriate to them.
- What core concept/concepts do you want the audience to leave with? It is better to expand on two or three memorable points than to have a long rambling narrative.
- Think about the purpose - whether you want to persuade/educate/inspire/inform/influence or all of these.
- Your presentation should have a clear introduction, a main body and a conclusion. Assessors will be looking for something well-structured with a logical flow.
- Be brief with PowerPoint slides or transparencies: only use bullet points and key words or phrases.
- Enhance any slides used with pictures, photos, graphs and screen-grabs as appropriate.
- Avoid too much detail. Be clear and concise and build your presentation to a strict time frame.
- If you are thinking of having some audience participation, remember to prepare and bring any materials that you will need to use.
- Think about any supplementary information: do you want to give out notes to the audience? When will you distribute them?

Delivery

- Be conscious of your body language - how you deliver your presentation is as important as what you say. Smile, maintain good posture, act confidently, speak clearly, keep good eye contact and try to relate to each person individually. If you tend to fidget try and control this, staying natural and composed.
- Pace yourself. Introduce yourself and your presentation confidently.
- Do not read from a prepared script - bring notes or prompt cards with bullet pointed headings to glance at if needed.
- Have a few relaxation techniques to use should you find yourself getting anxious. If you find that nerves overcome you just say so. Ask to stop for a few moments whilst you gather your thoughts.
- Wind down your presentation confidently, rather than stopping suddenly when you run out of things to say. Even if you are nervous and glad that it is over, make a brief and clear conclusion.

Assessment centres

Some organisations use assessment centres in their recruitment process. They may last one or two days or even longer and are usually held after the first round of interviews and before the final selection. They may also be used as an initial selection process. You will be asked to engage in a number of activities and exercises during which multiple assessors will observe and rate your performance.

Assessment centres typically include a number of elements:

- **Social/informal events:** where you meet a variety of people, including other candidates, the assessors, recent graduates and the wider staff and management team. Be aware that you are being assessed at all times. Be friendly but not over-familiar. There may be free drinks on offer - resist the temptation to over-indulge.
- **Information sessions:** provide more detail about the organisation and the roles available. Listen carefully, as the information provided may be useful during the rest of the day.
- **Tests and exercises:** designed to reveal your ability and potential. Assessors measure you against a set of competencies. Each exercise is designed to assess one or more of these areas. Do not worry if you think you perform badly at any stage - it is likely that you will have the chance to compensate later on. Find out if your careers service offers practice aptitude test sessions or presentation skills workshops.

If you have a disability that may affect your performance in any of the exercises mentioned, discuss the matter with the employer before attending the assessment centre.

A typical assessment day

Preparation

- Research the organisation's website - particularly the recruitment and other relevant information.
- Draw up a list of your main strengths, focusing on those most relevant to what you have applied for.
- Think of questions you may want to ask.
- Plan to arrive in good time for the start of the assessment centre.
- Converse with other candidates - this will help when it comes to group exercises later.

What to expect

- You will be in a group of people that can vary in size from several people to a much larger group.
- You may be individually interviewed and to asked to take part in a number of exercises, including reasoning tests. The exercises will be based on the type of work for which you have applied.
- Other exercises, usually undertaken with a number of other candidates, may take the form of an in-tray or case study exercise, a presentation and a group discussion.

Your performance

- You are not being assessed on what you know but on how you think. Be yourself.
- Listen carefully to the instructions given to you at the start of the day and always read the information thoroughly.
- The assessment centre will give you a number of chances to show your strengths and meet their criteria.
- Stay focused and motivated throughout the day.
- You are being measured, not against other candidates, but against certain criteria.

You will learn...

- How you react in different situations. You may find you have previously unidentified strengths.
- About the company you are applying to.
- More about the position you are applying for.

Criteria

The following are examples of the skills and traits that selectors are likely to be judging you on at the assessment centre:

- team-working;
- communication;
- leadership;
- time-management;
- listening;
- motivation and enthusiasm;
- data analysis;
- decision-making;
- influencing;
- creativity;
- integrity;
- initiative.

Group activities

Employers use group activities, generally during assessment centres, to assess your interpersonal communication skills. Quite simply they need to know that you can mix well with people. You may have to complete a practical task, complete a case study or take part in a discussion. Some employers will use a social event or activity to observe your behaviour.

Be aware that you are being assessed from the moment they meet you. Be well versed on the organisation, its sector and current affairs. Have interesting questions to ask of the organisation's representatives. Avoid the temptation to just chat to the other candidates.

Throughout the exercise they will observe your ability to work in a team and the type of leadership style you demonstrate. They will also be noting how you negotiate with your peers and how you get your point across.

Remember: good team working is about working together co-operatively to achieve a common goal. You can demonstrate leadership within the team by:

- showing that you are listening carefully and hearing what is being said;
- taking the initiative;
- facilitating others to speak;
- reflecting on what has been discussed and summarising periodically if necessary;
- staying positive and motivated throughout.

Practical tasks

You may be asked as a group to use equipment or materials to make something - a tower, using only straws and string, for example. The assessors are usually more interested in how the group interacts than in the outcome of the task. They will also be assessing your planning and problem-solving skills and the creativity of your individual ideas. Get involved, however trivial you consider the task to be.

Discussions and role plays

You may be asked to take part in a leaderless discussion or in a role-playing exercise which simulates a professional scenario. You will usually be given a briefing pack and be asked to play a particular part. You may have to act out the role either with the other candidates or with the assessors either one-on-one or in a group. The assessors are looking for your individual contribution as well as your communication and influencing skills.

Use the following tips to help you prepare:

- Read through and/or listen carefully to all the information you are given and make notes if allowed.
 - Decide objectives and priorities. Agree the division of tasks, make a plan and follow it.
 - Be assertive and persuasive, but also diplomatic – be conscious of the volume and tone of what you say.
 - Remember that the quality of what you have to say is more important than the quantity – don't confuse input with impact. Choose your timing carefully.
 - Make sure the group keeps to time. Help to steer things back on track if the discussion goes off track.
 - Keep calm, and use your sense of humour where appropriate.
 - Find a balance between advancing your own ideas and helping the group to complete the task.
 - Actively listen to what everyone has to say, using nods, smiles and eye contact. Try to get the best contribution from everyone and do not assume that quiet members have nothing to contribute. Be inclusive.
 - If a group member is dominating the conversation then try to support the participation of others.
 - Use positive language and behaviour.
 - Be conscious of your own style and its impact on the group. If you are naturally very chatty maybe you need to focus more on listening. If you are very quiet remember that you need to speak up to make an impact on the assessors.
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Exercises

Case studies and in-tray or e-tray exercises are business simulation tasks. They are designed to examine skills such as communication, organisational ability, problem-solving, data analysis, planning, time management and decision making. There is usually a time limit on these exercises. After the task you may be asked to justify your actions.

Case study exercises

In these exercises, you will be given a set of documents relating to a hypothetical or real-life situation. You are likely to be asked to analyse it and to give brief verbal or written report of your recommendations.

You may be asked to complete the case study individually or as part of a group. Some employers will set case study exercises as a discrete element of the selection process. Others may combine them with an interview. See the [McKinsey&Company Case Study Interview Exercise](#) for an example of this process.

Tips for tackling a case study:

- Practice with sample case studies in advance and brush up on your numeracy skills.
- Research the organisation, its markets and be up to speed on current affairs.
- Read the instructions carefully and thoroughly.
- Read any background information you are given about the organisation, the staff and your role. Focus on key points, and make brief notes. This will help you to get a feel for what is important.
- Scan through all items to get an overall view of everything that will need to be considered.
- Try to stay calm. Keep a note of the time to ensure you pace yourself correctly.
- Work as quickly and as accurately as you can.
- When presenting your conclusions or discussing your rationale be as clear as possible and don't be afraid to disagree with the selector if you feel you have made the right decision.

In-tray exercises

These are business simulation exercises in which you are given an in-tray or electronic inbox full of emails, company memos, telephone and fax messages, reports and correspondence. You will be provided with information about the structure of the organisation and your place within it. You are expected to take decisions, prioritise your workload, draft replies, delegate tasks, and recommend actions.

Each exercise is designed to test how you handle complex information within a limited time. It allows you to demonstrate that you can analyse facts and figures, prioritise information and make good decisions under pressure.

Tips for tackling an in-tray exercise:

- Read the instructions carefully and thoroughly.
- Try to stay calm. Keep a note of the time to ensure you pace yourself correctly.
- Read any background information you are given about the organisation, the staff and your role. Focus on key points, and make brief notes.

- Scan through all items in the in-tray or email inbox to get an overall view of everything that will need to be considered.
- Prioritise according to what is most important and most urgent. Decide what can be delegated, forwarded or deferred.
- Identify key issues and any action that must be taken - detailing how, by whom and any timescales or deadlines.
- Highlight any possible resource restraints, conflicts between tasks, or implications for the organisation.
- If asked to draft a written response to any item, identify the main points of your response quickly and expand concisely on these. Keep it as brief as possible – it is easy to get absorbed in this task but be wary of time.
- Remember: there is often no right or wrong answer. Demonstrate that you have identified key issues, and give your reasons for all the decisions you make.
- Work as quickly and as accurately as you can.

Some careers services have an online practice test available on their websites:

- [Edinburgh University in-tray exercise practice](#)
- [Assessment Day Free example in-tray exercise](#)

Check also with your careers service to see what they have to offer.

Essays/written exercises

Some employers may ask you to write an essay or letter on a topic of your choice or one given by them. Others may give you a document to review and improve. Here the selectors are testing how you express yourself, your spelling and grammar and whether you can communicate professionally and effectively.

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