


ASSESSMENT CENTRES AT A GLANCE

SHOWCASE YOUR SKILLS ACROSS A RANGE OF PRACTICAL TASKS.

An assessment centre involves taking part in activities related to the role you have applied for. It allows recruiters to observe how you use your skills in a practical work-based scenario. It is normally the final stage in the selection process before job offers are made.

As well as assessing your skills, the assessors will be looking for your interest in the job and company, and

your commercial awareness. Good preparation as well as knowing what to expect on the day are essential to performing well.

Assessment centres typically last between half a day and a full work day, and could consist of any number or combination of the tasks described in the table below. 

'Commercial awareness' PAGE 28
and 'Psychometric success' PAGE 43

GROUP EXERCISES

E-TRAY EXERCISES

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WHAT IS IT?	Working with others to complete a task or solve a problem. This could be constructing a tower from newspapers, analysing a complex business case or negotiating the allocation of budgets, for example.	Dealing with an inbox of email messages in a limited amount of time. Messages will often be a mixture of requests, internal memos and notes about phone messages.
WHAT DO THEY WANT?	To see how effectively you can work in a team. This could include negotiating and influencing skills, leadership, problem-solving ability and creativity. Check the job description to know exactly what the recruiter is looking for.	To see how you prioritise your work and make decisions about what type of action is required. This involves organisation, logic, time management and attention to detail. It is also a test of your commercial awareness.
HOW DO I DO WELL?	Be confident and assertive. Speak clearly and make regular, considered, well-articulated contributions. Listen to and encourage others, and give constructive feedback. Ensure everyone is involved in a task and ask the quieter members of the group for their opinions. You could offer to take notes or keep an eye on the time to make sure you finish the task.	Read the instructions carefully, and quickly look through all the information you are given. Identify the important issues, paying attention to any contradictions, key details such as dates, and anything involving a manager or client. Be ready for the unexpected – an urgent request could arrive during the activity which could change things!
WHAT TO AVOID?	Interrupting or dominating the discussion; not listening; running out of time; and getting off the topic.	Getting too involved in one email; not managing your time; and not justifying your decisions.



CASE STUDIES

You will be given a range of information (often including articles, graphs, and reports) and asked to summarise your recommendations based on the facts, either written or verbally. Some organisations will conduct case interviews, where you will be asked to explain your answers verbally and respond to questions.

To test your ability to take on information, analyse it and then communicate your findings. Problem-solving skills and business awareness are key.

Communicate clearly and succinctly, using an appropriate style and structure. Filter useful information from the irrelevant and decide what you can discard. There is generally no 'right answer' – it is about making logical conclusions using clear, well-reasoned arguments. Practise by giving yourself a short time frame to speed-read an article, then note down the key facts. Many employers have examples on their websites.

Straying from the brief and not answering the question. It's fine to acknowledge other points of view, but avoid sitting on the fence. Not managing your time and spending too long on one part of the question. Grammar and spelling errors.

PRESENTATIONS

Giving a presentation, either on a topic you are given on the day or on a topic provided in advance.

To test your ability to clearly communicate your ideas to an audience in an engaging and well-structured manner. If you have time to research in advance, they will be expecting well-researched content.

Use an appropriate style, speak clearly and use good eye contact. Make sure you stick to the brief and get across the important issues. Justify any opinions and be prepared to answer questions that challenge your idea.

Mumbling, looking down or at your notes instead of at the audience, and not sticking to the time limit. Trying to cover too much; be realistic about how much content can fit into the time limit.

SOCIAL/INFORMAL EVENTS

Lunch, drinks or office tours where you could meet a variety of people (other candidates, the selectors, recent graduates and senior management) allowing you to find out more about the organisation and ask questions in a more relaxed setting.

To see your interest in the company and industry, as well as your ability to network and present yourself professionally in an informal business situation.

Be polite and professional, enthusiastic and interested, as you are still being assessed. Ask lots of (intelligent) questions about the company and the projects that people are working on, for example. Be confident and polite at all times.

Making negative comments (including about other candidates, the weather and train delays), being late and eating or drinking too much. Avoid asking questions that could be answered easily from the organisation's website.