

Careers & Employability

A Quick Guide To Assessment Centres



University
of Worcester
Student Services

Assessment Centres

A Quick Guide

Assessment centres enable companies to assess the suitability of job applicants for a specific role. They involve completing a series of tasks and activities designed to assess the competencies and personal attributes required to carry out the role effectively.

What is an assessment centre?

Assessment centres usually last one day but may also take place over half a day or over 1-2 days. They can be tiring, as you will be moving swiftly from one assessed activity to another.

Assessment centre activities usually involve:

- a mix of individual and group activities
- being observed by a team of trained assessors
- being assessed against a set of competencies relevant to the job you've applied for

Assessment centres give companies an opportunity to:

- observe how you behave in a range of situations and under pressure
- explore how you work with others and on your own
- obtain feedback from a range of assessors

Preparing for an assessment centre

If you're invited to an assessment centre:

- find out as much as you can about the format/content
- practise the type of tests you will be asked to complete
- if you've been given the names of people assessing you, do some research into their roles and interests: [LinkedIn](#) can be very useful for this

You can find some links to assessment centre practice tests at the end of this booklet.

Any Queries?

send us a query on
myCareer

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Assessment centre activities

Competencies

Assessment centre activities are linked to the **competencies** required by the role you've applied for: a competency is a skill, an area of knowledge or a personal quality required by a specific job.

- **Technical competencies** ('hard' competencies) are the skills and knowledge you need to do a specific job. They will usually be outlined within the job description and/or person specification for the job.
- **Behavioural competencies** ('soft' competencies) are personal qualities and they give indications about the way in which you would carry out a job. Examples include:
 - creativity and innovation
 - time management
 - problem solving
 - interpersonal skills
 - analysing/ interpreting

Most employers will send you information on the competencies they require - if they don't, and they're not mentioned on the job description or person specification, check to see if any are mentioned on the company website.

Typical assessment centre activities

The main types of activities are listed below. Don't worry, you won't face all of them at one assessment centre but you are likely to be asked to undertake some of them. The different types of activities are designed to assess specific behavioural competencies e.g. group tasks will assess communication and teamworking skills.

You will carry out some activities on your own, whilst others will involve you working with other applicants:

- Presentations
- Written exercises
- Aptitude tests
- Personality tests
- Situational judgement tests
- In-tray/e-tray exercises
- Interviews (e.g. competency, technical or strength based)
- Group tasks/discussions
- Role plays
- Business case studies
- Physical challenges

Each activity is described, in turn, on the following pages.

SOME TIPS...

- Smile – it makes a good impression and puts people at their ease
- Don't shout, talk over others or speak too quickly
- Be sociable and professional
- Make eye contact

Presentations

Some companies will ask you to prepare a brief presentation on a given topic, either in advance of the assessment centre or on the day. You'll be told how long you have available for your presentation and you need to allow time for questions at the end.

During your presentation, you will be assessed on your:

- **Planning skills:** How closely have you read and understood the guidance you were given? Have you kept within the time limits?
- **Organisational skills:** Is your presentation well-structured? Are you in command of yourself and your materials?
- **Communication skills:** How clear is your message? How do you connect with your audience? How well do you respond to questions? How well do you perform when under pressure?

Some presentation tips

There are some technical issues you might want to check beforehand:

- If you're preparing a PowerPoint/Prezi or other electronic presentation, what software and technology is available e.g. laptop/projector/screen?
- If you're planning to access the internet, is there an internet connection?
- Should you bring your presentation on a memory stick?
- Does the company want you to send your presentation in advance?

When devising the content and style of your presentation:

- If given a topic, make sure you keep to it
- Keep your visuals clear and simple and avoid using large chunks of text
- Make sure it has a beginning (outlining what you'll be covering during your presentation), a middle (where you cover the content of your presentation) and an end (which summarises what you have said/your conclusions)
- Don't use too many slides
- Ask others to check your spelling/ grammar/punctuation - mistakes will be noticed!
- If you are asked to prepare your presentation before the day, make sure you practice it - this can help you to feel more confident in your delivery

When delivering your presentation:

- Speak clearly and vary your tone of voice
- Stand up straight, face your audience and don't cross your arms
- Make eye contact with your audience and remember to smile!
- Don't distract the audience by fidgeting or fiddling with something
- Don't stand in front of the screen
- If you need to use notes, use cue cards (key words, written on cards, that you can use as prompts)
- Don't stare at or read words from the projector screen
- Keep to the time allocated

Just in case the technology doesn't work on the day of your presentation, take printed copies (one per interviewer) so that you can still talk the panel through the details

Written exercises

Written exercises will test your skills in written communication, decision making and problem solving. Your task may or may not be relevant to the job and you will be given information to read, analyse and interpret. For example:

- if you've applied for a teaching role, you could be given a case study to read and then asked what actions you would take in that situation
- if you've applied for a customer services role, you could be asked to respond to a customer complaint
- if you've applied for a marketing role, you could be asked to produce a short report on potential markets for a new product

There is often no right answer - you will be assessed on:

- Your approach to the written exercise(s)
- Your findings and how you reached them
- How you present your findings/recommendations

Aptitude tests

These tests cover aptitudes relevant to the role you've applied for – popular examples include literacy, numeracy, problem solving, and spatial awareness tests.

You'll be given a set amount of time in which to complete the test(s) and given log in instructions. You may be asked to take a test online, either before, at the assessment centre or both.

- Graduates First practice tests in numeracy, verbal & abstract reasoning www.worc.ac.uk/careers/psychometrics

Personality tests

Personality tests assess how you behave in a given situation - there are no right or wrong answers, and you can't pass or fail, but the company will want to see if your responses match with the type of person they want to appoint.

They're designed to identify any inconsistencies in your responses so answer each question honestly. Some of the most widely used personality tests are the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), 16PF, and OPQ. You may be asked to take an assessment online, either before or at the assessment centre.

- Graduates First Work Personality questionnaire assesses your preferences in the workplace www.worc.ac.uk/careers/psychometrics

Situational judgement tests (SJT)

SJTs present a range of scenarios that job applicants may experience on-the-job. Applicants are asked to choose between different options and decide which is the most effective course of action, and which is the action they would take within that scenario.

SJTs are usually written tests which applicants may complete at application stage or at assessment centre.

The Assessment Day website provides more information about SJTs with a free example test: www.assessmentday.co.uk/situational-judgement-test

Many assessment centres include some time for socialising, even if it's just a refreshment break.

Whilst you're not usually formally assessed during these breaks, your behaviour and interaction with others will be noticed

In-tray/e-tray exercises

In-tray (paper-based) and e-tray (computer-based) exercises test your planning and organisational skills, plus your ability to prioritise work and make judgements.

You will be given a range of materials (e.g. letters; emails; reports) and will be asked to decide in what order you will tackle them and how you will respond to them. You may also be given later additional items of information or be interrupted during the exercise to see how you respond to pressure.

- Assessment Day is a useful website which offers some free sample in-tray and e-tray exercises: www.assessmentday.co.uk

Interviews

For advice, see the 'Interviews - A Quick Guide' booklet which is available from firstpoint.

Group tasks/discussions

As most jobs require the ability to work effectively in a team, many assessment centres will include at least one group task: the skills being assessed are usually leadership, team working, problem solving and communication.

The point is not to "win" or "lose" - you will be assessed on how well you work with team members, debate and negotiate, as well as your interpersonal skills and the contribution you make to the completion of any task.

Some tips for group tasks/discussions:

- Keep your ideas and suggestions relevant to the discussion
- The quality of what you say is more important than how much you talk
- Listen carefully to others, and show that you have understood by nodding and responding where appropriate
- Ask for other people's opinions and include others in discussions
- Don't interrupt or talk over other group members
- Stay calm, even when someone is annoying you
- Don't look at the assessors
- Keep an eye on the time

Role plays

Some employers ask applicants to role play a scenario that you could face when doing the job you've applied for. This helps the employer to find out how you would behave in a similar situation, how you communicate with others and what impact you have on those around you.

If you're asked to take part in a role play, you'll be given an outline scenario plus any background information that you need. You will be given some time to prepare, along with a time limit within which you will be expected to bring the situation to some kind of conclusion. The other person will be taking the role of, for example, a colleague, a customer or a manager and will have been given guidance on how to behave with you.

Role play scenarios have included:

- Selling a new product to a retail buyer (for a sales role)
- Having a difficult conversation with a member of staff (for a human resources role)

Some role play tips:

- Read the brief carefully: don't make any decisions about your approach until you have read **all** of the information you've been given
- Identify and prioritise the most important issues: address them first
- Get into role at the start of the role play, and stay in role until the end
- Be polite and calm, but be firm if necessary – don't show extremes of behaviour i.e. don't lose your temper or shout!
- While still in role play make sure you bring the meeting to a clear end, clarifying what is going to happen next

Business case studies

Case study activities are based on real-life scenarios. They help the company to see how you work with others and to assess competencies relevant to the job you've applied for. During the case study activity you will need to focus upon:

- identifying the key data/facts relating to the task you've been given
- discussing these with other group members
- putting forward your ideas and giving due consideration to others' views
- contributing to the group's decision about the best way forward

Physical challenges

Physical challenges assess your physical fitness, and may also assess other competencies such as organisation, leadership and co-operation if you are working with others. They are only used when the job requires you to be physically fit and tend to be used for uniformed occupations, particularly the Armed Forces.

If you'd like to know more, here are some useful websites:

www.worcester.ac.uk/careers/assessmentcentres

www.prospects.ac.uk/careers-advice/interview-tips/assessment-centres

www.wikijob.co.uk/wiki/assessment-centre

<http://targetjobs.co.uk/careers-advice/assessment-centres>

Websites offering free practice psychometric tests:

www.worc.ac.uk/careers/psychometrics

www.kent.ac.uk/careers/psychotests

www.shldirect.com/en

www.assessmentday.co.uk

FEEDBACK

After the assessment centre, reflect on your performance. Ask the company for feedback. They will usually provide this in a letter, email or during a phone call.

Where verbal feedback is provided, try to take notes of what the person tells you.

If you have a question that isn't covered by this booklet, or would like to talk through your ideas with a member of the Careers team, sign up for a careers appointment on myCareer.



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