Assessment Centres and Psychometric Tests

Including Second Interviews

Version 8.15
Contents

What is an Assessment Centre .......................................................... 2
What do I wear .................................................................................. 2
When will I receive the result? .......................................................... 2
Can I ask for feedback? ................................................................. 3

Presentation by the Employer and/or Office/Factory tour .......... 3
Social Events ...................................................................................... 3

Interviews .......................................................................................... 4
Technical Interviews .......................................................................... 5

Group Exercises .................................................................................. 5
Discussion groups .............................................................................. 6

Case studies ......................................................................................... 9
In-tray exercises ................................................................................ 11
Presentations ....................................................................................... 12
Role plays .......................................................................................... 12
Essays and written exercises .............................................................. 13

Psychometric tests

Ability tests ..................................................................................... 14
Personality tests ................................................................................ 14
Situational judgement tests ............................................................... 15
How psychometric tests are used ...................................................... 15
How abilities change over time ......................................................... 16
Practice tests ..................................................................................... 16

Sample Assessment Centres programmes ..................................... 17
Top tips ............................................................................................. 20
**Assessment Centres**

Essentially, an Assessment Centre is a place where a number of candidates are brought together by an employer for assessment. Assessment Centres give the employer a chance to see how candidates behave individually and in a group.

Typically, they take place after:
- a) A review of an Application Form/CV
- b) Some form of initial assessment such as a telephone interview or psychometric test.

Assessment Centres can be held at an employer’s premises, city centre location or even a country house and can last from a few hours up to two days.

Detailed below are all the components that may make up an Assessment Centre. Usually, they will not include everything we mention. You will either be sent a programme of events before you attend or you will receive one when you arrive. Study it carefully and prepare whatever you can in advance.

**What do I wear?**

Unless told specifically otherwise, dress as you would if you were attending an interview. Obviously, if you have an overnight stay you would take a change of shirt etc. Some organisations, particularly the emergency services and armed forces, will have physical exercises and will tell you what to bring with you. Make sure you read your joining instructions carefully and pack everything that is required.

**When will I receive the result?**

It varies, from the next day to a week or more. Some organisations, holding a number of Assessment Centres, will not make a final decision until all have been completed; others notify candidates immediately after each one. If they don’t say, you can ask.
Can I ask for feedback?
At this stage in the recruitment process, particularly because the numbers are relatively small, employers will usually provide feedback if asked.

Presentation by the Employer and/or Office/Factory tour

Often, the Assessment Centre will start with a presentation by the employer describing the organisation, their graduate scheme and career progression opportunities; this is sometimes followed by an office/factory tour. Pay attention to what is said, and make notes if needed, as it may be useful to you at a later stage for example, a second interview. This section may not be formally assessed but staff will inevitably be forming impressions of the candidates so look interested and ask questions where appropriate.

Social events

You are likely to meet senior personnel, graduate trainees and other candidates at informal events such as coffee breaks or dinners. Generally, you are not being formally assessed but you will be under scrutiny; assessors sometimes ask for the opinions of other company personnel who have met you on these occasions and that can also apply to staff you meet on arrival or on the tour (see above). It is a good opportunity to learn about the company culture and experiences of staff who may be your future colleagues. If a partner or managing director is present, don’t be afraid of talking to them as well – they have come in order to meet you. Try to think of questions that would not be answered by any of the organisations marketing or recruitment material.

Consider how your behaviour will appear to the employer. If you are naturally shy make an effort to talk with people you meet. Also take care
with how much alcohol you drink! It is likely to impair your judgement and show you in a poor light.

**Interviews**

Second round interviews may involve a panel of interviewers. The tip here is to direct most of your answers to the person who asked you the question while acknowledging, by brief eye contact, the other members of the panel. Don’t be put off by someone on the panel who says nothing but makes copious notes; they’re just that – note takers.

Sometimes you will be interviewed one to one, in sequence. Don’t panic, it’s just the way that organisation does things and is likely to be a time saving measure.

It is almost certain that you will be interviewed by at least one senior manager from the organisation. They are likely to be an expert in the field of work that you have applied for. Make sure you have researched the organisation so that you have some idea of what it does and where it’s going in the future. Keep in touch with current events by reading journals, newspapers and watching the news daily.

Questions are likely to be more probing than at a first interview and may revolve round topics that the first interviewer highlighted as needing further exploration. Keep in mind the list of competencies that were tested in earlier rounds. After the first interview, were there questions where you were not satisfied with your answers – motivation maybe or an example of team working? Think how you might perform better next time; the subject may come up again.

Above all, keep up your end of the dialogue in an enthusiastic and interesting way.
All the advice for First Interviews applies here too.
**Technical interviews**
Obviously ‘technical’ interviews will take different forms depending on the role for which you’ve applied. By their nature they will tend to have right and wrong answers but frequently it is your thought processes that are being tested and the odd slip-up is not disastrous. It’s a case of you preparing thoroughly and knowing the subject. Don’t be surprised if you are asked questions about things you might have studied in your first year so remind yourself of the topics that you have covered.

Examples: For an engineering role you may be shown a piece of machinery and asked to explain what it is and how it works; for an I.T. job you could be asked to interpret some programming; for a scientific vacancy you may find yourself having to write out a formula to explain a chemical reaction or explain how to design an experiment to test an idea; for a finance related job, be prepared for questions on understanding what the role entails and current financial issues (in this case a thorough study of the financial press will be necessary).

**Further resources about interviews:**
Including guides and videos are available on our website. [www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/interviews](http://www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/interviews)
A number of books covering different interview types and for different roles are available in our Careers Library

**Group exercises**

These are an important part of any Assessment Centre.

Group exercises often take the form of a team discussion or exercise with assessors observing from the edge of the room. A number of qualities can be demonstrated in group situations. These include drive, decisiveness, self-confidence, social skills, communication, debating skills, logic, quick thinking, imagination, time management and speed in assimilating data.
The following are the different types of exercise you are likely to encounter with advice on contributing effectively.

**Discussion Groups**

This could be on:
- a topic related to the career you are applying for
- an issue of current affairs
- a subject related to a case study briefing you have just been asked to read

Organisations often recruit to a standard. None, one or all of you may be selected, in which case the other group members are not in competition with you. In fact the selectors are likely to put considerable weight on your ability to get on with the others. Think of the group as a team engaged in the same task. It is possible for all members of your group to pass or fail this aspect of the assessment.

The *way* you contribute is as important as *what* you contribute. The selectors are not expecting you to be an expert on the subject under discussion but they do want to see evidence that you can make an effective contribution to the group.

It is important to get involved but you must avoid the temptation to dominate the discussion. A discussion topic will be given to you, or your group may have to choose its own subject. Some employers will encourage you to choose a discussion leader but it is more likely that you will be discouraged from this.

You will be given a time limit and asked to reach a decision within the allotted time. Time and agreement are the issues here – very often there is no single ‘right’ decision.

Assessors are at least as interested in the quality of your thinking and presentation as your particular point of view.
- Avoid thinking about the assessors; concentrate on the task in hand.
- If you are given a discussion document the previous evening read it carefully. Try to decide what position you will take in the discussion and why.

The following notes should help you make a more effective contribution.

1. Keep your contributions short
   Your point is more likely to be understood and to have impact if you keep it reasonably short.

2. Avoid interrupting others to make your contribution and do not let others interrupt you
   In some discussions it can be difficult to make a contribution. Once you get the chance to speak there is a temptation to make several points at once but this should be avoided.

3. Keep your non-verbal behaviour assertive
   Both the **volume** and **tone** of your voice are important if you speak too quietly you will lose impact and be open to interruptions. When making a comment make eye contact with other members of the group, this enables you to judge how your contribution is being received.

4. Timing your contribution
   If you want to influence a discussion it is not just **what** you say that counts but also **when** you say it. Raise points at the relevant time for maximum impact. Don't wait until the last minute before airing an opposing view - if others are on the verge of making a decision they will be irritated if you suddenly come up with opposition.

5. Getting a reaction to your contribution
   If you follow the suggestions above you stand a good chance of getting a reaction. If, however, no one reacts - then ask the group or an individual for a reaction.
6. Changing your mind
   This is a valid thing to do, especially in light of new information or better ideas. Be honest and open about it - not apologetic.

7. Falling in with the majority
   If after exploring all the options you find yourself in the minority and time is pressing - it can be assertive to "fall in" with the majority rather than prevent the discussion from progressing.

8. Not falling in with an apparent majority
   You have a responsibility to make your doubts and disagreements known. It is important not to let the discussion be dominated by others whose point of view may be less valid than your own.

9. Deciding which issues to make a stand on
   If in a discussion you find yourself out of line with the majority view being expressed, there will be many issues on which you could take a stand. There is a danger that if you take a stand on every issue it will become counter-productive and you will be labelled as awkward and negative. Make sure you know what you are talking about if you decide to make an individual stand on an issue.

**Group Building Roles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Initiator</th>
<th>The Clarifier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>suggests new or different ideas for discussion</td>
<td>gives relevant examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>proposes new or different approaches to problems</td>
<td>probes for meaning and understanding of matters under discussion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Opinion Giver</th>
<th>The Tester</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>states pertinent beliefs about what group is considering and others' suggestions.</td>
<td>raises questions to &quot;test out&quot; whether group is ready to come to a decision</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Elaborator</th>
<th>The Summariser</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>elaborates or builds on suggestions made by others</td>
<td>tries to pull together or reviews the discussion content</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Group Maintenance Roles

- **The Gate Keeper**
  - keeps communications open
  - creates opportunities to encourage participation by others

- **The Harmoniser**
  - mediates difference of opinion
  - reconciles points of view

- **The Compromiser**
  - does not stick stubbornly to a point of view but is willing to yield when necessary for the progress of the group

- **The Encourager**
  - praises and supports others in their contributions
  - is friendly and supportive

Case Studies

You may do a case study individually or as a group. Case studies are similar to in-tray exercises in that you are given a great deal of written information and are expected to make a decision or recommend a course of action within a time limit. You may have to present your recommendations individually or as a group and/or discuss them in an interview.

You will always be given too much information to read properly in the time available so it’s a good idea to skim read rather than get bogged down in the detail.

In a group case study, often there is no right or wrong answer. The assessors are looking for how you approach the task, how you work with other people in the group, how you organise, prioritise and present your arguments and how you respond when your opinions and recommendations are challenged.

You cannot practice for a specific case study as companies obviously do not release them ahead of time. You can however familiarise yourself with how case study tasks are set out and practice reading quickly and extracting the critical points.
Question 5 in Part One and Part Two of our specimen **In-Tray Exercise** (see overleaf) is typical of a case study you might be asked to undertake alone. You would be allowed 30 minutes for this one. A suggested answer is contained in Part Three.

**Case study interviews**
In a case study interview you may be asked to go through a particular business scenario. They are most applicable for those going for roles within Consulting or Investment Banking.

Sometimes there are role play case studies where the interviewer acts in a role play with you and you work through the scenario together. The interviewer supplies you with information and they may volunteer information as you work through the case. Often you need to ask questions to extract this information. Typically, you are not given any time to prepare.

The interviewer is looking at how you analyse information, conclude, act and recommend actions so:
- Ask questions to clarify facts.
- Maintain good eye contact and listen carefully to the information you are given
- Make sure the interviewer is clear on your thought processes and working out

**Further resources about case studies**

A number of reference books on case studies are available in the Careers Library.

- [www.acethecase.com](http://www.acethecase.com)
In-tray / e-tray exercises

In-tray exercises are designed to simulate a situation that may face a manager on returning from a holiday or other absence. A pile of paper is given to you that will consist of letters, phone messages, internal memos etc. You may be asked to prioritise the documents in order of importance and/or write notes with your suggested response to each. There will be a time limit within which to complete the task.

E-tray versions of the exercise will consist of you being sat in front of a computer and dealing with a series of emails which arrive on your screen.

Further resources about in-tray exercises

- Specimen In-Tray exercise - available to collect from Careers or download from our website.
  [www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/applicationsinterviews/assessmentcentres/](http://www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/applicationsinterviews/assessmentcentres/)
- Assessment day – sample in-tray exercise
  [www.assessmentday.co.uk/in-tray-exercise.htm#freeTests](http://www.assessmentday.co.uk/in-tray-exercise.htm#freeTests)
- Civil Service Fast Stream example e-tray exercise
  [www.cubiksonline.com/Cubiks/Etray3/Instructions/ShowInstructionsForEtray](http://www.cubiksonline.com/Cubiks/Etray3/Instructions/ShowInstructionsForEtray)

Presentations

You could be called upon to make a short presentation on a subject of your choice or on a given topic. You are likely to be given advance notice of this when invited to the assessment centre but you could prepare each topic of your own choice beforehand, just in case you are asked on the day. Rehearse what you want to say, preferably in front of a mirror, so that you get the timing right. A normal start to Assessment Centres is to ask people to speak about themselves, which you can also easily practise in advance.
As part of a case study you may be required to present your recommendation for a course of action. In this case you could be presenting to a ‘panel’ of assessors and you will have to answer questions on your recommendations.

Further resources about presentations
- A number of reference books on presentation skills are available in our Careers Library.
- Presentation Skills handout - available to collect from Careers or download from our website [www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/applicationsinterviews/assessment centres](http://www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/applicationsinterviews/assessment centres)
- This is also covered in the Assessment Centre Video.

Role plays

Role plays are often related to the type of work for which you’ve applied. For example, the assessors may adopt the roles of complaining customers if you’ve applied for a job in retail. In Human Resources the assessor might role play a troublesome member of staff.

You will not be expected to be an expert on company procedures or services, although you can often pick up hints during presentations and tours (another reason why you should pay attention during these sessions), the observers will be looking at your interpersonal skills and how well you think on your feet. Above all, listen and don’t prejudge the situation.

Essays and written exercises

You may be required to complete a written exercise the nature of which may vary depending on the type of role for which you have applied. Writing a short essay on a given subject is common, as is writing a
business letter, perhaps in response to a prescribed query or complaint. Alternatively you might be given a document littered with spelling, formatting and grammatical errors to correct. These exercises are intended to test your written skills particularly spelling and grammar but also may test your ability to communicate effectively and professionally in writing.

Although common don’t think that written exercises will be limited to literary or administrative jobs; IT and Finance firms use these methods too.

**Psychometric testing**

Psychometric testing describes a range of exercises used by employers to gauge an individual’s aptitude or personality. Used correctly the tests give an additional insight into candidates and will verify points coming out of interview. Psychometric tests usually form part of an overall selection process, whether at an assessment centre, or beforehand at the interview stage.

**Psychometric testing - ability tests**

Ability tests measure one or more of the following skills: numerical, verbal reasoning, spatial awareness and diagrammatical reasoning. The tests used depend on the type of role for which you’re being assessed for.

Verbal and numerical tests are used to select graduates for a wide range of jobs, including most business and management functions. Diagrammatic tests are used mainly for computing/IT jobs.

Most tests are timed and are designed so that you will be unlikely both to complete them and to get everything right. If you are unable to finish the majority of a test it will be difficult to achieve a high score. Therefore getting the balance right between speed and accuracy is important. The
best advice is to work as quickly and accurately as possible and avoid guessing just in case negative marking is used (i.e. the number of incorrect answers is deducted from the number of correct ones, to give a net score.)

Tests are generally bought from specialist companies (such as SHL), the recruiter then decides what the pass score will be depending on the demands of the job. Although highly unlikely you could theoretically sit the exactly the same test for two companies and give exactly the same answers yet pass one and fail the other because they set different pass marks.

**Psychometric testing - personality tests**
Employers sometimes use personality tests to assess if you have the personal qualities for the job. Different roles require different attributes. You could answer questionnaires of this type in exactly the same way for different employers and be acceptable to one and not another. Sometimes you are given a series of statements and asked to mark the one that is most (M) like you and the one least (L) like you. The thing to remember is not to try to anticipate the employer’s requirements. There are built-in checks to ensure your answers are consistent. Answer honestly; there are no right or wrong answers. If you don’t pass the personality test chances are you were not right for the job and would not have thrived in the position.

**Psychometric testing - situational judgement tests**
Situational judgement tests are becoming increasingly common. They are used by employers to establish how you would potentially behave in different situations. You will be asked a set of questions that simulate the kind of decision making you might be faced with in the role. The employer will have a set of responses which reflect how their ideal candidate would respond. Your answers will be marked against these.

**How psychometric tests are used in the selection procedure**
The part that tests play in getting you the job will vary greatly. For some
employers test scores have major significance whilst others look at candidates’ test scores alongside other evidence. Some employers may use tests to ‘cream off’ high-scoring applicants but for many others it may be enough for your scores to fall within, or slightly below, the average group.

The earlier in the selection procedure you are asked to sit a test, the more influential it will be to your eventual selection. It is important to begin tests in the best possible frame of mind. If you do not feel well on the day of a testing session, try to rearrange it. If there is any factor that may affect your performance (e.g. a disability or if English is not your first language) inform testers in advance so that this can be taken into account.

If you have already completed a psychometric test earlier on in the application process do not be surprised if you are asked to complete another at the Assessment Centre. Usually this is to verify that you had completed the original test and not someone else.

**Psychometric testing - how your abilities change over time**

Whilst studies show that, for most people, practising will only increase scores slightly, some people are able to make some improvement. Familiarity with the testing process may enable you to make more efficient use of your time and feel more relaxed. Try not to anticipate tests too much however, and follow all instructions on the day very carefully.

**Practice tests**

There are a number of ways the Careers Service can help you practice psychometric tests.

- Practice test online. We subscribe to a number of tests from Profiling for Success. These tests include verbal, numerical and abstract reasoning tests, a type dynamics indicator which looks at
dimensions of your personality and a learning styles indicator which looks at your approach to learning. 
CareersLink login required to access passcodes.  
[www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/applicationsinterviews/psychometric/taketheassessment](www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/applicationsinterviews/psychometric/taketheassessment)

- The Careers Service runs regular testing sessions at nominal cost; check the events on the website or ask at the Careers Service for forthcoming dates.  
[www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/applicationsinterviews/psychometric/practicetests/sitatest](www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/applicationsinterviews/psychometric/practicetests/sitatest)
- A collection of practice psychometric test practice books are available on reference at the Careers Service. Check the Careers Library database for a full list of titles.  
[www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/library](www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/library)

Links to different practice tests on the Careers Service website:  
[www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/applicationsinterviews/psychometric/practicetests](www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/applicationsinterviews/psychometric/practicetests)

Including:

- **Graduates First**
  Numerical, verbal, and logic reasoning, situational judgement, personality questionnaires and more.  
[https://portal.graduatesfirst.com/cp/MANCHESTER/Login.aspx](https://portal.graduatesfirst.com/cp/MANCHESTER/Login.aspx)

- **SHL**
  Major UK-based test provider that produce tests for many UK graduate recruiters.  

- **Situational judgement test** – practice  
[www.assessmentday.co.uk/situational-judgement-test.htm](www.assessmentday.co.uk/situational-judgement-test.htm)

- **Skillswise**
  Improve your numeracy and literacy on the BBC website.  
[www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise](www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise)

- **Assessment Centre HQ**
Verbal, numerical and logical reasoning tests.
www.assessmentcentrehq.com/psychometric-tests

- **Practice Aptitude Tests.com**
  Numerical, verbal and diagrammatic tests.
  www.practiceaptitudetests.com

## Sample Assessment Centres programmes

There’s no such thing as a standard Assessment Centre

We have tried to cover all the areas that appear in assessment centres but they do take many forms

Two are outlined here:

**A one day Assessment Centre undertaken by candidates applying for trainee management positions in finance with a large PLC consists of -**

### A.M.
- **9.00** Arrival & Coffee
- **9.15** Self-introduction by candidates – name, degree, university etc.
- **9.30** Introduction to the Company and details of the training scheme.
- **10.00** Psychometric test – Verbal
- **10.15** Break
- **10.30** Written Exercise (solo – 45 minutes)
- **11.15** Group Exercise (timed construction task)

### P.M.
- **12.05** Lunch with current graduates (45 minutes)
- **1.00** Interview with a member of the recruitment team and a senior business manager (45 – 60 minutes)
- **2.15** Psychometric Test – Numerical
- **3.15** Close of day for candidates (Assessors gather to review
performance and decide who are to be offered positions. All candidates advised of a decision within 24 hours)

An example of a BP Assessment Centre that takes place over two days -

**Day 1**

P.M.

2.00 Attendees gather to meet with those administering the event to check in, have their photo taken and receive their schedule for the event.

2.30 Candidates meet the BP assessors and introduce themselves.

3.00 Candidates attend an introductory presentation by the BP recruitment team.

3.30 Candidates are then split up to begin completing the components of the assessment.

3.30 - 5.00 Attend a ‘technical’ interview. With two interviewers present, this will last for approximately an hour. Science and engineering graduates face a technical question. For non-science, engineering and technology applicants, the interview consists of one or two scenarios involving the decisions facing a BP manager. The scenarios are likely to be based on a real example. Two assessors lead the candidate through the decisions to be made and develop the answers with further questions.

5.00 - 6.30 Individual exercise. Candidates are given a range of company information and must make recommendations.
about the future of the organisation and whether it should continue as it is or diversify into different areas.

6.30   Assessment finishes for the day with a welcome break before meeting for dinner.

7.30   Candidates and assessors meet in the bar and then have dinner. There is no formal assessment taking place here but it’s still wise to be on your best behaviour while also relaxing and chatting to others.

**Day 2**

**A.M.**

8.30 - 10.00   Written group exercise on potential oil/gas field sites. Each candidate is given separate information and must assess the commercial, logistical and health & safety advantages and disadvantages.

10.00 - 11.30   Group discussion where candidates must reach a consensus on which oil field would be the most suitable based on the given information.

11.30 - 1.00   The last stage involves a competency interview with two interviewers. This is based on the four competencies identified by BP as important for its recruits. Many companies make detailed information about the competencies they look for available on their website and in their recruitment marketing. It’s important that you research these well in advance to know what they are looking for so you have examples to hand that you can use to illustrate these skills.

**P.M.**

1.00   Lunch and departure for the candidates. The assessors now meet to decide which candidates have met the standard and are to be offered a position. All candidates, successful
or not, are offered personal feedback.

**Top Tips**

- Remember, when taking part in those group exercises you are not in direct competition with each other. The assessors want to see how you react and work with others.
- Be pleasant with all the people you meet. What’s wrong with wishing other candidates good luck when they go off for their interviews? It does get noticed.
- If you are given a tour of the organisation and it’s appropriate, speak to some of the employees, not just the ones who are wheeled out for you to meet at coffee or lunch.
- The thing to remember is that Assessment Centres are expensive, time consuming events for employers and are therefore carefully designed to find the best candidates for the vacancies on offer. So, even though the exercise you are asked to undertake may seem a little bizarre it will have a serious purpose.
- The majority of students tell us they found their assessment centres enjoyable and stimulating. The single most common piece of advice from those attending interviews and assessments is ‘be yourself.’
- You can find a number of books covering team work, managing meetings, report writing and other useful assessment centre and workplace skills in the Careers Library.