



## An easy guide to group interviews

### **What is a group interview?**

Group interviews (often known as assessment centres) are where many candidates gather together to be assessed while they participate in an exercise of some sort. You can't predict the exercise you'll be involved in, however, there is a lot you can do to improve your performance in this situation.

The employer will already have selected the best candidates through the usual method of reading cover letters and résumés, but the group interview enables them to reduce the candidate pool further by de-selecting unsuitable candidates in bulk.

### **How do they work?**

Typically, the group 'interview' involves one or more exercises designed to imitate a work environment. One example involves dividing the group into two or more teams and giving each team a hypothetical (usually work-related) situation or dilemma to resolve. Each team is then asked to present its results in front of the entire group. Sometimes the dilemma is not work-related, such as one case when candidates were asked to choose which 50 out of 100 passengers should be saved from a sinking ship. These types of hypothetical situations cause a lot of controversy and interviewers can tell a lot from them about how people interact, influence, and reach decisions.

### **How should I behave?**

Although they are observing the group, it's the individual performance they are interested in, so you must make a good impression.

What they are observing about you:

- How well you interact with others
- How good you are at influencing and persuading
- Whether you work well in teams
- How effective your communication styles are
- Whether you reach decisions rationally or on a hunch
- If you listen well to others
- How well you manage under stress

In addition, the interviewers might be interested in seeing who takes charge and how effectively he or she delegates tasks to others. How individuals react to the leader is also very revealing.

They will be interested to know if the leader:

- Involves all other team members, even the quiet ones
- Can take on feedback and alter his or her course in light of new ideas
- Listens and questions well
- Gives praise where praise is due



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During group interview exercises it is better to be one of the leaders than one of the followers, but this can get ugly if a 'power struggle' arises. If so, it won't score you any points. If you want to lead and have a chance to express an interest and state your case, do so but be gracious if you are not chosen. Do not sabotage the leader's performance in protest.

If you are not a natural leader, that's okay. Half the group will want to lead, so you won't be forced into it. However, you must be an active participant as a minimum. Don't simply observe and say nothing or you will not be eligible to be considered to move ahead in the hiring process.