

Starting Points: Assessment Centres

What is an assessment centre?

An assessment centre is a series of tasks as part of the application process. It is made up of different activities so that employers can see how you react in real situations, not just in a face to face interview or application form. It is very popular with employers (particularly prominent graduate recruiters) because they can assess many candidates at the same time and see how candidates react to tasks they may encounter in their real roles.

They are usually structured around a one, two or three-day period to assess your suitability for a job and often come after introductory interviews or psychometric tests.

What activities will I be doing?

Assessment centres often comprise of a selection of activities, which could include

- interviews
- in-tray exercises
- psychometric tests
- role plays
- presentations
- group exercises
- technical tests or exercises (e.g. for STEM roles)
- social events such as dinner or lunch
- several mini/speed interviews (often only five minutes)
- written exercises / case studies

The activities you do on the day are usually linked to the type of role you are applying for, so you may not always do all of the activities above. For example, a sales role may involve a role play where you may have to sell something to the employers.

Group exercises

- Group exercises are the most common in assessment centres and usually involve a specific task with a group of four to six people.
- This could be a scenario-based decision making task, practical based activity or discussion around a work-related scenario.
- Usually there will be half as many assessors as candidates.
- Tasks will be timed.
- You will be observed by one of the assessors.
- You need to focus on meeting the objective that the group has been set, but do remember that the process is often more important than the group result.

Written exercises

- These can include activities such as in-tray/e-tray exercises or case studies.
- May involve writing a letter or report on a certain topic or you may be given a document to review or summarise.
- In-tray/e-tray exercises are designed to simulate a typical day at work in that you have to collate, sort and analyse information they are more likely to include less important tasks alongside more urgent ones.
- Case study exercises ask you to collate and analyse the information given and to draw conclusions from it.

Presentations

- Used to assess your ability to communicate formally with groups and also to give you an opportunity to provide your own ideas.
- Usually you are given a topic and timeframe in advance so you can prepare in your own time.

Psychometric tests

- Used to identify a candidate's aptitudes, personality or ability.
- Designed to test numerical, verbal and spatial ability
- Mostly performed online, although you may find some remain as hard-copy questionnaires.
- Some tests enable you to save your answers and return to complete the test at a later stage - others are timed.
- Are often used for preliminary screening or may be used as part of an assessment centre.

Top tips for success

Good preparation is key to performing well during demanding assessment-based interviews.

Before the assessment centre

- Research both the job and the organisation in detail, what are they like? What things are they looking out for in their candidates?
- Find out as much as you can about the format of the assessment event in advance.
- Practise sample tests and exercises.
- Rehearse any presentation or interview with someone else to get some real feedback.
- Find out the competencies and skills that the organisation is seeking.
- Get a good night's sleep so that you are relaxed and rested in the morning.
- Be in the right place at the right time looking presentable and alert.

During the assessment centre

- Be punctual for each exercise during the day and manage your time during tests.
- Listen carefully to all instructions and ask questions if unclear.
- Take an active part in exercises and social activities (if you don't say anything, the recruiter can't give you any marks)
- Be enthusiastic regardless of what you are asked to do.
- Be yourself and try to enjoy it.
- Don't dominate, take over or assume responsibility in any group situation.
- Don't feel intimidated by other candidates.
- If you think you did not do too well in a particular exercise don't let it affect your performance in other elements of the assessment.

Useful resources

- GraduatesYorkshire - <https://www.yorkshiregraduates.co.uk/assessment-centres>
- Prospects: [prospects.ac.uk/interview_tips_assessment_centres.htm](https://www.prospects.ac.uk/interview_tips_assessment_centres.htm)
- Careers Central: <https://www.shu.ac.uk/careers/application-tips/assessment-centres>

Want to talk it through?

Contact Careers and Employability for further advice and support via the below contact details. This information is available in alternative formats on request.