

## Team Interview updated on Jan 2025

### Tips on interviews and Group Discussions.

Many companies conduct group discussion after the written test so as to check on your interactive skills and how good you are at communicating with other people. The GD is to check how you behave, participate and contribute in a group, how much importance do you give to the group objective as well as your own, how well do you listen to viewpoints of others and how open-minded are you in accepting views contrary to your own. The aspects which make up a GD are verbal communication, non-verbal behaviour, and conformation to norms, decision-making ability and cooperation. You should try to be as true as possible to these aspects.

- \* In a group discussion what should my objectives be and how should I achieve them?
- \* Is it wise to take a strong stand either in Favor or against the topic right at the start of a Group Discussion?
- \* Is it a good strategy to try and be the first speaker on the topic in a GD?
- \* In an interview how does one handle the question "Tell us about yourself?"
- \* Is it better to have a longer selection interview or a shorter one?
- \* In the MBA entrance interview how do I justify my decision to pursue the MBA programme?

In order to succeed at any unstructured group discussion, you must define what your objective in the group is. A good definition of your objective is - to be seen to have contributed meaningfully in an attempt to achieve the right consensus

The key words in this definition are 'seen', 'meaningfully', and 'attempt'. Let us understand what each of these imply in terms of action points:

#### FIRST

- \* The first implication is that merely making a meaningful contribution in an attempt to achieve consensus is not enough.
- \* You have to be seen by the evaluator to have made a meaningful contribution in an attempt to build the right consensus.
- \* In other words you must ensure that you are heard by the group. If the group hears you so will the evaluator.
- \* You must get at least some airtime. If you are not a very assertive person you will have to simply learn to be assertive for those 15 minutes. If you get cowed down easily in an aggressive group, you can say goodbye to the business school admission.
- \* Many GD participants often complain that they did not get a chance to speak. The fact of the matter is that in no GD do you get a chance to speak. You have to make your chances.

#### SECOND

- \* The second important implication is that making just any sort of contribution is not enough.
- \* Your contribution has to be meaningful.
- \* A meaningful contribution suggests that you have a good knowledge base, are able to structure arguments logically and are a good communicator.
- \* These are qualities that are desired by all evaluators.

Many GD participants feel that the way to succeed in a GD is by speaking frequently, for a long time and loudly. This is not true. The quality of what you say is more important than the quantity. Don't be demoralized if you

feel you have not spoken enough. If you have spoken sense and have been heard, even if only for a short time, it is usually good enough. You must have substance in your arguments.

Therefore, think things through carefully. Always enter the room with a piece of paper and a pen. In the first two minutes jot down as many ideas as you can. It pays to think laterally. Everybody else will state the obvious. Can you state something different? Can you take the group ahead if it is stuck at one point? Can you take it in a fresh and more relevant direction? You may like to dissect the topic and go into the underlying causes or into the results.

One way of deciding what sort of contribution is meaningful at what point of time is to follow two simple rules. First, in times of chaos a person who restores order to the group is appreciated. Your level of participation in a fish market kind of scenario can be low, but your degree of influence must never be low. In other words, you must make positive contributions every time you speak and not speak for the sake of speaking. The second rule is applicable when the group is floundering. In this situation a person who provides a fresh direction to the group is given credit.

The third implication is that you must be clearly seen to be attempting to build a consensus. Nobody expects a group of ten people, all with different points of view on a controversial subject to actually achieve a consensus. But did you make the attempt to build a consensus?

The reason why an attempt to build a consensus is important is because in most work situations you will have to work with people in a team, accept joint responsibilities and take decisions as a group. You must demonstrate the fact that you are capable and inclined to work as part of a team.

#### **What are the ways that you can try to build consensus?**

**First**, you must not just talk, you should also listen. You must realize that other people also may have valid points to make. You should not only try to persuade other people to your point of view, but also come across as a person who has an open mind and appreciates the valid points of others.

**Second**, You must try and resolve contradictions and arguments of others in the group. You must synthesize arguments and try and achieve a unified position in the group. Try to think of the various arguments of yours and others' as parts of a jigsaw puzzle or as building blocks of a larger argument for or against the topic.

**Third**, Try and lay down the boundaries or the area of the discussion at the beginning. Discuss what the group should discuss before actually beginning your discussion. This will at least ensure that everyone is talking about the same thing.

**Fourth**, Try and summarize the discussion at the end. In the summary do not merely restate your point of view; also accommodate dissenting viewpoints. If the group did not reach a consensus, say so in your summary

You must carry people with you. So do not get emotional, shout, invade other people private space. Do not bang your fist on the table except in extreme circumstances. If you have spoken and you notice that someone else has tried to enter the discussion on a number of occasions and has not had the chance to do so maybe you could give him a chance the next time he tries. But do not offer a chance to anyone who is not trying to speak. He may not have anything to say at that point and you will just end up looking foolish.

The surest way of antagonizing others in the GD as well as the examiner is to appoint yourself as a de facto

chairperson of the group. Do not try to impose a system whereby everyone gets a chance to speak in turn. A GD is meant to be a free-flowing discussion. Let it proceed naturally. Do not ever try to take a vote on the topic. A vote is no substitute for discussion.

Do not address only one or two persons when speaking. Maintain eye contact with as many members of the group as possible. This will involve others in what you are saying and increase your chances of carrying them with you. Do this even if you are answering a specific point raised by one person. One last point is you must not agree with another participant in the group merely for the sake of achieving consensus. If you disagree, say so. You are not there to attempt to build just any consensus. You have to attempt to build the right consensus.

Is it wise to take a strong stand either in Favor or against the topic right at the start of a Group Discussion?

In theories yes! If you believe something, why shouldn't you say so? If we are convinced about something our natural response is to say so emphatically. However in practice what is likely to happen if you take a very strong and dogged stance right at the beginning of the interview is that you will antagonize the people in the group who disagree with you and will be unable to carry them with you and convince them of the validity of your argument.

We therefore recommend that after you hear the topic you think about it for a minute with an open mind and note down the major issues that come to your mind. Don't jump to any conclusions. Instead arrive at a stand in your own mind after examining all the issues in a balanced manner. Only then begin to speak. And when you do so outline the major issues first and only then state your stand. In other words give the justification first and the stand later.

If you were to state your stand first chances are that the others in the group who disagree with your stand will interrupt to contradict you before you can elaborate on the reasons why you have taken that stance. In this situation the evaluator will only get an impression of what you think and not how you think. Remember you are being evaluated on how you think and not what you think

Is it a good strategy to try and be the first speaker on the topic in a GD?

In most GD's the opening speaker is the person who is likely to get the maximum uninterrupted airtime. The reason is simple - at the start most other participants in the GD are still trying to understand the basic issues in the topic, or are too nervous to speak and are waiting for someone else to start. Therefore the evaluators get the best chance to observe the opening speaker.

Now this is a double edged sword. If the opening speaker talks sense naturally he will get credit because he opened and took the group in the right direction. If on the other hand the first speaker doesn't have too much sense to say, he will attract the undivided attention of the evaluators to his shortcomings. He will be marked as a person who speaks without thinking merely for the sake of speaking. The person may lead the group in the wrong direction, and does not make a positive contribution to the group.

So remember speaking first is a high-risk high return strategy. It can make or mar your GD performance depending how you handle it. Speak first only if you have something sensible to say. Otherwise keep shut and let someone else start.

In an interview how does one handle the question "Tell us about yourself?"

A very common question asked. Perhaps the most frequently asked question across interviews. Your opening statement needs to be a summary of your goals, overall professional capabilities, achievements, background (educational and family), strengths, professional objectives and anything about your personality that is relevant and interesting. This question represents an opportunity to lead the interviewer in the direction you want him to go e.g., your specialty or whatever else you may wish to highlight.

Your intention should be to try to subtly convince the interviewers that you are a good candidate, you have proved that in the past, and have a personality that fits the requirement. Remember that the first impression you create will go a long way in the ultimate selection. Keep in mind, most candidates who are asked this question just blurt out their schooling, college, marks and qualifications. All this is already there in the CV. Why tell the interviewer something he already knows?

A final word on approaching this question. Once you have said what you have to say - shut up. Don't drone on for the sake of speaking for you just might say something foolish. Sometimes interviewers don't interrupt in order to give the candidate the impression that he has not spoken enough. This is just a stress inducing tactic. Don't fall for it, if you feel you have spoken enough. In case the pause gets too awkward for you just add something like,

"Is there something specific that you wish to know about me?" Is it better to have a longer selection interview or a shorter one?

The length of an interview in no way is an indicator of how well an interview went. This is especially so when there are a number of candidates to be interviewed for example in the civil services interview or the MBA entrance interview. In the past a number of candidates have reported varying lengths of interviews. Nothing positive or negative should be read into this. An interview is only a device whereby the panel seeks information about the candidate. Information that will help the panel decide whether or not the candidate should be selected.

If the panel feels that, they have gathered enough information about the candidate in 15 minutes of the interview and they are sure they have no further questions to ask, then interview will be terminated in 15 minutes. If on the other hand the panel takes an hour to gather the information required to take a decision the interview will last for an hour. In either case the decision could be positive or negative. It is a fallacy to believe that interview panels take longer interviews of candidates whom they are more interested in. No panel likes to waste its time. If an interview is lasting longer than usual then it only means that the panel is seeking more information about the candidate in order to take a decision.

In the MBA entrance interview how do I justify my decision to pursue the MBA programme? When you are asked this for God's sake don't tell the panel that you are looking for a "challenging job in a good firm with lots of money, status and glamour". That is the first answer that most candidates think of. Unfortunately, it is the last answer that will get you admission. In the answer to a direct question on this subject you must convey to the interview panel that you have made a rational and informed decision about your career choice and your intended course of higher study. There are broadly six areas which your answer could touch upon:

**Career Objectives:** You could talk about your career objectives and how the two-year MBA programme will help you achieve them. This implies that you have a clear idea of what your career objectives are and how you wish to achieve them. For example, you may want to be an entrepreneur and wish to set up your independent

enterprise after doing your MBA and then working for a few years in a professionally managed company. You could explain to the panel that the MBA programme will provide you with the necessary inputs to help you run your business enterprise better. But then you must be clear about what the inputs you will receive in the MBA programme are.

**Value Addition:** That brings us to the second area that your answer should touch upon. What is the value you will add to yourself during your two-year study of management? Value addition will essentially be in two forms knowledge and skills. You will gain knowledge of various areas of management e.g. marketing, finance, systems, HRD etc. and skills of analysis and communication. You will find it useful to talk to a few people who are either doing their MBA or have already done it. They will be able to give you a more detailed idea of what they gained from their MBA.

**Background:** Remember, there must be no inconsistency between your proposed study of management and your past subject of study or your past work experience. If you have studied commerce in college then management is a natural course of higher studies. If you are an engineer this is a tricky area. You must never say that by pursuing a career in management you will be wasting your engineering degree. Try and say that the MBA course and your engineering degree will help you do your job better in the company that you will join. But then you should be able to justify how your engineering qualification will help

**Opportunities and Rewards:** You could also at this stage mention the opportunities that are opening up in organizations for management graduates. Highlight with examples. At the end you may mention that while monetary rewards are not everything, they are also important and MBAs do get paid well. You must not mention these reasons as your primary motivators even if that may be the case.

### **General Tips Good to Know!**

- \* A good level of general awareness will come in handy so that you aren't at a loss of words on certain issues
- \* Understand the topic and analyse it mentally before speaking
- \* Be clear about the purpose and content of your viewpoint
- \* One should be able to communicate his views in an effective manner to everyone. Be clear in speech, audible but not too loud and above all remain confident
- \* Remember the six C's of effective communication -- Clarity, Completeness, Conciseness, Confidence, Correctness and Courtesy
- \* You should maintain eye contact with all others in the group and not focus on a particular person for he may benefit from that
- \* Be responsive to ideas from other people and seem to be very receptive and open-minded but don't allow others to change your own viewpoint.
- \* Starting the discussion is considered to be good however it isn't that important; what is important is that you speak for a period long enough for you to be able to communicate your viewpoint
- \* Always maintain your calm and never get aggressive. If you haven't been able to talk then one can cut in saying "Excuse me, but what I think is ....." or something of that sort
- \* Never lose your temper and never attack anyone on a personal front. Your attitude should be one of cooperation and not one of conflict
- \* Don't lose sight of the goal of the discussion
- \* Listen to any criticisms and give them a thought before trying to defend your views