

GD-Frequently asked Questions updated on Jan 2025

Group Discussion- Frequently Asked Questions and Explanation

What is the normal duration of a GD?

A GD is generally of 15-20 minutes duration.

How many panel members are there to evaluate?

There are usually 3-4 panel members to evaluate.

Is there time given for preparation after the topic is given and before starting the GD?

Usually some time (2-5 minutes) is given to collect one's thoughts, but there could be instances when this does not happen, so it is best not to bank on this.

Should I address the panel or the group members?

Don't ever make the mistake of addressing the panel members. The GD is between you and the other members, not the panel members. You must avoid even looking at the panel members while the GD is in progress. Just ignore their existence.

What is the seating arrangement like?

It could be semi-circular, or circular, or seating alongside a rectangular table, depending upon the venue. It is best not to bother about trivial issues like this, which you have no control over.

How should I address the other group members?

If you are initiating the discussion, you could do so by collectively addressing the group as "Friends". Subsequently, you could use names (if the group has had a round of self-introduction prior to starting the discussion and you remember the names) or simply use pronouns like "he" or "she".

Suppose I have a lot to say on the topic, should I say all of it?

You would not be looked upon favourably if you kept speaking all the time and did not listen to anyone else. Contrary to the misconception, the person who talks the most is not necessarily the one who is judged the best. The quality and not the quantity of your contribution is the success factor.

Should I encourage others to speak up?

Do not directly put someone who is consistently silent on the spot by asking him/her to speak up. If someone has been trying to speak and has a good point but is cut off constantly, you may encourage him/her to continue with her point as you would like to hear her out.

Are the group members supposed to keep track of the time or will the panel keep track?

It would be good if you are conscious of the time, but not to the point of getting so distracted looking at your watch that you do not contribute to the discussion.

Are we allowed to carry a piece of paper during the GD for noting down important points?

Normally you are, but there may be instances when it is specifically forbidden to carry paper.

Is there any particular seating arrangement, which is favourable to the participants?

If participants are asked to sit in a circle or a semi-circle, one position is as good as another. But if you are asked to sit on either side of a rectangular table, then choose a position as close to the centre as possible.

Should we begin the GD by appointing a leader amongst ourselves?

No. You should not. Leadership in a GD is established implicitly through one's performance in a GD.

Should we distribute the total time available to all the participants to ensure that everybody gets a chance to speak?

Since a GD is not a debate or elocution, the participants should not resort to the strategy of distributing time amongst themselves.

Can we take a definite stand in the GD and then later on during the GD, switch over to another stand?

Yes, provided you do it the right way. In a GD it is quite likely that some other participant's counter-argument convinces you to your point. If this happens, then it is best if you accept his argument and explain to the group how your previous argument was true within a narrow range, and how the new argument is applicable to a broader range. Naturally, it is safer not to make any rash statements for or against a topic before you learn the facts of the argument. Blindly taking a stand will definitely lead you to trouble. This does not mean you should sit on the fence. You may participate actively by pointing out both sides of the issue in a reasonable and logical manner.

If we do not understand the meaning of the topic, should we ask the moderator to explain it to us?

No. You cannot. Instead of displaying your ignorance in this manner, it is better to wait for some other participant to explain the meaning of the topic. So listen to the discussion carefully for the first few minutes and when you have figured out what the topic is about, start participating in the discussion.

Should we address the other participants by their names or their assigned numbers?

As far as possible, you should try and avoid names or numbers. It is better to use pronouns such as "he", "she", "you" etc. while referring to the members of the group.

Are we expected to stick to the normally accepted line of thought or can we come up with something radical?

By all means you can. It would demonstrate your creativity and originality. Just make sure it is relevant to the topic.

If I feel strongly about an issue, should I voice my feelings?

It is important to be cool and emotionally objective in a GD. If you react emotionally, you are likely to lose control over yourself during the group discussion. You have to be calm and logical, not emotional in a GD.

Can I use technical terms or jargon, which is clear to me, but not to the group?

If you have to use technical terms, please do not use abbreviations. After mentioning the term in full take time out to explain to the group what it means. It is quite likely that other participants of the group have a different academic background from you, and you should make sure you are all on a level playing field.

Do I begin my participation by requesting the group's permission to do so?

It is not likely that you will get a chance to ask for such permission. It may also go against you (as appearing weak on your part).

What is the right time to enter a GD to ensure that I am heard properly?

In any GD, there are crests and troughs during the discussion. The crest is when the noise level is at its peak. The trough is when there is almost total silence. Ideally, you should enter the GD during the trough period. But in competitive GDs, the crests occur more often and troughs may not occur at all. In such cases, you could identify the stages in the GD, where ideas dear to you are being discussed and enter the GD irrespective of the noise level.

How do I participate when the noise level is too high?

You could try the following strategy - Identify the most powerful speaker in the group, and note down the points that he/she is making. The moment the noise level reduces a little, enter supporting the powerful speaker. You will have made a strong ally who will carry you through the noise.

Do I have to be cautious about other participants' feelings (on sensitive issues like religion, caste etc)?

You certainly do. Insensitivity to others displays a lack of maturity and viciousness. It will act against your favour.

Is it beneficial to be the first speaker in a group discussion?

Being the first speaker is a high risk, high return strategy. If you can make a good opening statement, which is relevant and sets the tone for the GD, it will go in your favour. If you do this well, you may automatically become the group leader. However if you bungle it up (by speaking for the sake of speaking, not really having anything pertinent to say), it will be remembered and will go against your favour.

How critical is my fluency in English to my performance?

Command over English is certainly advantageous but will not compensate for lack of good content. If your content is good, then even if your English might not be great, you must speak it out, rather than be inhibited by lack of good English. You will get credit for soundness of ideas.

How necessary is it to use examples for illustrating an idea?

Use of examples is helpful in elaborating your point, and helping others understand your idea better. But please remember to keep it short and simple because in a competitive GD nobody has the patience to listen to long, drawn out examples.

How much or for how long should I participate?

In a 20 minute GD with 10-12 participants, you should try and participate at least 4 times with each entry lasting at least 25-30 seconds. You could participate more depending on your comfort level and the need for participation.

Is it good to be humorous in a GD?

Depends on the situation. In a GD that is fairly relaxed, it may be acceptable. But in a competitive situation, where the participants are tensed up, your attempts at humour may fall flat.

Should we make an interim summary?

An interim summary is a way of directing the group mid-way through the GD. It helps the group to pick out and focus on the most important points and thus use the remaining time more effectively. However it is not necessary to make an interim summary, if the discussion is already well focused.

What do I do if someone else has already said what I wanted to say?

You have two choices:

Agree with the point made by that person and add on to it by displaying the applicability of the argument to different situations. By doing this you will have broadened the scope of the argument.

Drop the point and think of fresh points.

To avoid getting into a situation where someone else has already spoken your points, do speak up in the first 4-5 minutes of the GD. If you wait longer, it is almost inevitable that someone would have spoken your points.

Is the use of slang/colloquialism permitted?

It is best to avoid using slang.

Can I use a language other than English to drive home my point?

No. You will have to stick to English.

How is aggression taken and measured in a GD?

The moment you notice people reacting to you negatively or strongly, you may take it that you are being too aggressive. The degree of the reaction is the measure of your aggression.

What level of aggression is seen acceptable?

There is a very thin line between aggression and assertiveness. You should always aim to sound assertive and not stubborn.

Is it true that the person who speaks the most in a GD is the one who is most successful?

This is a myth. Generally the person who has a sound knowledge of the topic and is a clear thinker speaks more. This leads the students into believing that whoever speaks most is successful. But just speaking for the sake of speaking will not take you far.

Will I be quizzed about my (or others) participation in the GD?

You may be. Therefore it helps to be alert all through the GD.

Is it true that the GD is used more as an elimination technique rather than as a selection tool?

Depends on the institute. In most premier institutes it is used as a selection tool, not as an elimination technique.

What is the level of accuracy desired in the facts and figures you quote during the GD?

An error margin of 5% is acceptable.

Is motivating other people in the group to speak looked upon favourably?

Depends on how it is done. If you openly request someone to speak, you may be putting the other person in a difficult spot, and the evaluators will not look that upon favourably. It is therefore better to use other means of motivation, such as agreeing with a halting speaker, adding on to their points, implicitly supporting and giving them direction.

Does the moderator have any biases or preconceived notions about the topic?

Ideally the moderator is supposed to be unbiased and neutral. But being a human being, the moderator cannot be totally free from bias. Since this is not a factor within your control, there isn't much point losing sleep over it.

Can we expect the moderator to stop or cut short the GD much before the stipulated time is over?

This may happen if the GD becomes too noisy and if the level of discussion deteriorates abysmally.

Can I be aggressive with a lady participant?

A GD is not the place to demonstrate chivalry. Being rude to any participant (male or female) is downright unacceptable. You need not extend any special privileges to a lady.

Is it all right to ask pointed questions to other participants during a GD?

It is alright to ask questions for the purpose of clarification but not for the purpose of playing the devil's advocate and proving them wrong. By playing the devil's advocate, you hamper the flow of the GD. The pointed questions unsettle the other participant and the quality of the GD deteriorates. This would reflect badly on you and will go against your favour.

Is it necessary that a group should arrive at a conclusion in the stipulated time?

Ideally a group is supposed to reach a conclusion. Normally the time constraints do not allow the group to do so.

Is an end-summary absolutely essential?

No. If the group has not reached a conclusion, then it would be good if someone puts the whole discussion into perspective by summarizing. But if there isn't sufficient time, a summary may be avoided.

Do we have to write a synopsis of the GD once it is over?

Some institutes insist on this, but it is not universal.

Is voting an acceptable method of reaching a consensus?

Certainly not. A GD is not a debate.

How should a group select a topic if asked to?

The group should brainstorm for about two minutes and narrow down the list of topics to 3-4. After this the group should prioritize them based on the comfort level and ease of discussion of the topics. This could be done by asking each participant to rank the 4 topics and the most popular choice should be taken.

Are the topics decided on the basis of the academic background of the participant?

No. Topics are usually general in nature to give a level playing field to everyone.

What do I do if one member is very stubborn and aggressive?

You could use any of the following methods.

Ignore him and address the other members of the group.

Be assertive and tell him that his argument is faulty.

Point out to him that his point is well taken and that the group must progress further by discussing the ideas

presented by others.

What are the acceptable ways of interrupting somebody else, so that I may make my point?

You can interrupt in any of the following ways:

"Excuse me, but I feel that what you are saying isn't universally true ..."

"Yes, I agree with your idea, and I would like to add on to it ..."

"Yes, I think you are right when you say that, but could you clarify what if ..."

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