

Assessment Centres

Mostly large employers use assessment centres to observe how graduates respond in simulated work-related situations and to administer further tests.

Assessment centres are set up by employers to provide a way to test whether shortlisted candidates have the skills that are required for the role or organisation.

Why do employers use assessment centres?

Employers are looking for evidence of skills and personality traits required for effective team work such as:

- Listening and contributing
- Handling team dynamics, especially dominant members and quiet or shy members
- Adaptability – trying different things and knowing when to change approach
- Communicating clearly and effectively

Employers set appropriate tasks and tests and evaluate your responses during these exercises. Attending an assessment centre can typically take a full working day.

Commonly, assessments are grouped into competency tests and psychometric tests. This information sheet covers competency tests - there is a separate takeaway sheet on Psychometric Tests.

What are competency tests?

There are many kinds of competency tests. Employers may use one or a combination of the following tests:

Presentations



Topics could be provided in advance to allow preparation time, whereas some are given on the day. The theme could be a challenge facing the sector, how you would approach it or how you go about solving a work-related problem. It may be a sales pitch: what *you* have to offer, a product or service. The topic really depends on the organisation.

You will be assessed on both your content and how you present. Here are some tips:

- Ensure you know the topic, time limit and what visual aids are expected.
- Only write key ideas in text on your slides. Make use of appropriate images that will help you to keep the attention of the audience.
- Electronic presentations must be backed up and tested on different systems. Trigger cards assist you from going blank or losing your way.
- Ensure your presentation is within the time limit and practise it ahead of the time.
- Be prepared to answer questions and discuss your research at the close of the presentation.



Written assessments

Written assessments are typically time-pressured, work-related situations, with materials provided. They test your ability to handle pressure, solve problems, and communicate your ideas effectively in writing. Always read the brief carefully and stick to it exactly.

The task could relate to activities you will need to perform in the job so think of yourself as having been offered the role. The written exercise could be in the form of: in-tray exercises, case studies or drafting exercises.

→ In-tray role play

You are given a scenario, for example returning to work after a period of leave and finding several tasks that need to be done to catch up. An in-tray activity allows the assessors to assess how you: handle pressure, prioritise tasks (so distinguish between urgent and important), delegate and justify your choices.

→ Case studies

A case study typically asks you to solve a problem. It gives the assessors insight into your ability to: absorb and analyse information, make logical decisions, argue your case and clarify issues.

After a case study exercise there is often a discussion with an assessor. Be prepared to offer analysis of what happened, the decisions you made and what the alternatives would have been. You are not trying to provide one 'correct' answer, but rather discuss and analyse your decisions. Acknowledge where you made assumptions, used facts or made a mistake.

→ Drafting exercises

Drafting exercises are designed to test your ability to communicate effectively and tactfully on a sensitive topic. Keep your answer clear, direct, and be appropriate to the audience. Make sure your answer addresses the issue directly and diplomatically.

Examples are creating press statements covering an accusation made about the organisation or speaking to a staff member about their performance on a task.

Group exercises



You may be given a business plan to develop, a topic to discuss, a case study or work-related task to perform, or a presentation to prepare. You will be assessed on your ability to: work constructively in a team, agree on a solution, and to divide tasks and roles amongst the group. The role you take in this exercise will also be assessed, but this does not mean you have to take the lead. Maintain clear communication signals and practise two-way communication – both listening and speaking.

Interviews



Interviews are covered in our takeaway sheets: *"Preparing for interviews"* and *"Handling interview questions"*.

Psychometric tests



Psychometric tests can be done online, or in a testing venue. These are covered in the takeaway sheet entitled *"Psychometric Tests"*.