

# Group Discussions: Skills to Succeed

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**Abstract Organizations conduct Group Discussions to explore whether the prospective candidates have the aptitude where they can align their personal goals with the organizational goals for long term success. Group Discussions are held mainly because business management is essentially a group activity and working within groups is one of the most vital parameters of being successful, as a manager. Apart from that, the candidates are appraised on the basis of their communication skills, knowledge, leadership skills, listening skills and conceptualizing ability. This paper sheds light on concept and features of group discussions. What are the parameters in GDs? This paper also highlights the dos and don'ts as regards to Group Discussions are concerned.**

**Keywords: Group Discussions, Leadership Skills, Communication Skills, Personality Development, Interpersonal Skills, Campus Placements**

## I. INTRODUCTION

A large number of placement companies necessarily include Group Discussions (GDs) as a screening tool in their selection process. The process of placements demands rigorous preparations for the GDs. Group Discussions are adopted by the firms, these days to judge the readiness of the student and his/her fitment in the job. While selection tools and techniques such as tests and interviews provide a substantial data about an individual, they fall short of providing a real life data on how an individual would perform in real life situations, especially in a group situation.

As the term suggests, it is a discussion among the group of persons. The group of students should have ideally maximum 10 students who then share their views freely on the topic of discussions to the better understanding of the topic. The abilities of the team members are determined within a specified time limit.

"Group Discussion", popularly labeled as GD, is a methodology utilized by an organization, such as a Company, Institute, Business School, and Selection Boards in the Government Sector to evaluate whether the candidate possesses certain personality traits. GD forms a significant part of the short-listing process for recruitment or admission in a company, institution or a government organization. In the process, a group of students to be evaluated is formed. A relevant topic of discussion is given from latest developments in different spheres of life. Participating members are given a breather after topic announcement where they can quickly jot down the important points related to the topic for the better quality of discussion. The fundamental objective of the GD is to gauge analytical thinking and spontaneous reactions.

### 1. Salient Features of Group Discussions

1. The topic is usually from current issues pertaining to any sector, like Politics, Sports, Business, Entertainment etc.
2. Students' group is formed where there is no formal leader is announced. All are given a topic to discuss and present their point of view on same. They can also be presented with a business problem and asked to discuss a probable solution.
3. The examiner does not interfere once the topic has been announced unless and until discussion is going in the wrong direction.
4. Generally, the members of the Group Discussion are allotted some time to gather their points before the start of the discussion. This time is meant to jot down thoughts on a piece of paper.



**Fig. 1.1 Group Discussions**

## 2. What do the Employers Assess through Group Discussion (GD):

1. Leadership Skills –Candidate is checked on the parameter whether he or she has the quality in him or her to inspire team members to attain a common goal.
2. Communication Skills –Participating members are assessed on their thought process and clarity in spoken language. One of the major aspects is listening which requires patience. It indicates a willingness to accommodate others' views and opinions.
3. Interpersonal Skills - Interpersonal skills are a critical aspect of any job requirement. It is important that the individual interact with the team members effectively in every situation. The person has to be more people-centric and less egoistic or self-centered.
4. Persuasive Skills - It is important that the leader motivate others to analyze problem at hand from different angles before getting to the optimal solution.

There are a few sub-skills also that get assessed along with the skills mentioned above which are mentioned below:

- Clear thoughts
- Managing Conflicts in the group
- Subject Knowledge
- Open to accepting new ideas
- Logical Decision Making

## II. COMPONENTS OF GROUP DISCUSSIONS

The Group Discussion (GD) exercise can be divided in three parts that are mentioned below:

1. Initiation Techniques
2. Body of the Group Discussion
3. Summarization/ / Conclusion

### III. INITIATION TECHNIQUES

The initiation of a Group Discussion is always a high profit-high loss strategy. When anyone in the group takes an initiative to start a discussion, he/she immediately comes into limelight and can get good points for the same. If a person can make a favorable first impression with his/her content and communication skills after initiating a GD, it would help the person in smooth sailing through the discussion. On the other hand, if the initiative is not taken with full confidence and correct facts, there could be negative points for the same too.

However, in case a person initiates a GD but does not carry forward the discussion by discussing in detail after that, it conveys the impression that the initiation of the GD was done simply for the sake of starting it or hoping to grab the initial points earmarked for an initiator. Responsibility of giving the right direction to the discussion lies with the one who took initiative to start it. Therefore, a Group Discussion should only be started if the candidate has an in-depth knowledge about the topic at hand.

## 3.2 Body of the Group Discussion

### 4.2.1 Quotes

If the topic of a GD is: Should the Censor Board be abolished? The candidate could start with a quote like, 'Hidden apples are always sweet'.

For a GD topic like, Customer is King, one could quote famous saying, 'there is only one boss: the customer. The Customer can make everyone jobless in the company by shifting his/her loyalty somewhere else.'

### 4.2.2 Definition

Start a GD by defining the topic or an important term in the topic.

For example, if the topic of the GD is "Is Advertising all about telling lies", the member can start the discussion by defining advertising in the textbook way to set up the tone for discussion.

### 4.2.3 Question

Asking a question is a powerful manner of starting a GD.

It does not indicate asking a question to any of the candidates in a GD; so as to hamper the flow. It implies asking a question and answering it. Any question with a negative intent i.e. to pinpoint someone in the discussion must not be asked.

Questions that promote a flow of ideas are always appreciated. For a topic, such as, "Should India go to war with Pakistan?" The discussion could be started by putting a question in front of the group that "has not war always brought destruction for the country?"

### 4.2.4 Facts, Figures and Statistics

If anyone wants to include statistics in the discussion to strengthen his/her point, it has to be made sure that he/she stays as accurate as possible to the real figures. Approximation to be avoided as far as possible. Stating wrong facts works to one's own disadvantage.

### 4.2.5 General Statement

It is always appropriate to use a general statement to put the GD in the proper perspective. For example, if the topic is, "Should Young players be awarded Khel Ratna awards?" Rather than jumping to the points in favor or against the agenda, discussion could be brought in the track by saying, 'let us first identify the criteria a person needs to qualify to receive such an honor. This will help us reach the conclusion in a more objective and effective manner.'

## 2.2 Summarization/Conclusion:

Most Group Discussions do not really have conclusions. A conclusion is where the whole group decides in favor or against the topic. But every GD is summarized in a

nutshell. The following points should be kept in mind while summarizing a discussion:

1. Avoid raising new points.
2. Avoid stating only your viewpoint.
3. Avoid dwelling only on one aspect of the GD.
4. Keep it brief and to the point.
5. It must incorporate all the important points that were discussed during the GD.
6. If the examiner asks you to summarize a GD, it means the GD has come to an end.
7. Do not add any new point once the GD has been summarized.

#### IV. COMMON PARAMETERS FOR EVALUATING IN GROUP DISCUSSIONS:

There are four parameters for evaluating the Group Discussions:

**5.1 Personality:** Personality includes appropriate dressing, body language, facial expressions, tone and voice and mannerism.

**Table No. 1.1: Positive and Negative Traits of Personality**

Positive Traits	Negative Traits
Smartness	Shyness
Cheerfulness	Arrogance
Respectful	Rudeness
Courteous	Irritable
Confidence	Lack of Confidence
Enthusiasm	Defensive
Willingness to learn	Disinterest
Well groomed	Condescending
Keeness	Nervousness

**5.2 Communication Skills:** Effective communication is not one of those inherent traits; it can be learnt and mastered. Communication skills require not only eloquent expressions of ideas, but also active listening and responding appropriately.

**Table No. 1.2: Positive and Negative Traits of Communication Skills**

Positive Traits	Negative Traits
Fluency	Sarcastic
Clarity	Lack of Clarity
Coherence	Incoherence
Voice Modulation	Monotonous
Patient Listening	Poor Listening
Assertiveness	Fumbling
Effectiveness	Aggressiveness
Persuasiveness	Distracted
Right Choice of Words	Use of Fillers and Vocalized Pauses

**5.3 Knowledge:** Keeping yourself abreast of latest developments and good command over the topic would

naturally lead to an active and enthusiastic participation.

**Table No. 1.3: Positive and Negative Traits of Knowledge**

Positive Traits	Negative Traits
Depth of Knowledge	Incorrect Information
Analytical Ability	Lack of Analytical Ability
Coordination of Thoughts	Lack of Interest
Diversity in Views	Superficial Understanding of the Topic
Correctness of Information	Lack of Ideas
Updated on recent developments	Ignorance about recent developments

**5.4 Leadership:** In a Group Discussion, leadership is defined by making a valuable contribution, steering the group in right direction, being respectful to other members, communicating effectively and listening actively.

**Table No. 1.4: Positive and Negative Traits of Leadership**

Positive Traits	Negative Traits
Offering a chance to others to contribute	Intolerance
Team Spirit	Lack of Responsibility and Belongingness
Decisiveness	Indecisiveness
Flexibility	Rigidity
Taking an Initiative to maintain a decorum in the Group Discussion	Lack of Initiative to Maintain the decorum in Group Discussion
Meaning Contribution	Selfishness

#### 5. Dos and Don'ts in the Group Discussion

1. Presenting Ideas effectively: State valid points and support them by substantial reasoning.
2. Listen to the other participants actively and carefully and show respect to them.
3. Modulate the volume, pitch and tone.
4. Talk with confidence and self-assurance
5. Show enthusiasm and exhibit professional etiquette.
6. A group discussion is a chance to be more vocal. The evaluator wants to hear you speak.
7. Seek clarification if you have any doubts related to the subject before the GD Starts.
8. Do not try to dominate the discussion by raising the voice or crushing anyone's point.
9. You are the participant in the group discussion and not the evaluator. Hence, rather than evaluating others and your performance, participate in the discussion.
10. Don't lose your patience, if anyone says anything you object to. The key is to stay objective. Donot take the discussion personally.
11. While speaking, donot keep looking at a single member. Address the entire group in such a way that everyone feels you are speaking to them.

## V. CONCLUSION

Group discussion is a systematic and purposeful interactive oral process in academic, business and administrative spheres. The exchange of ideas and thoughts take place through oral communication in GDs in a systematic and structured way. GD is useful for students also as it train them to prepare on different topics of discussion and current subject matters. It improves one's thinking, listening and speaking skills. It also promotes one's confidence level. Success in GD may ensure good admission offer or lucrative job offer. Thus it is important to be able to take part in a GD effectively and confidently. Participants of GD must be aware that speaking with confidence, exhibiting team skills shall earn them good points and help the group to achieve common objective.

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