

How can I prepare for a great Group Discussion (GD)?

How does the group discussion work?

On any Management Admission Test you will be put in a group of 8 to 10 candidates. You will be given a specific situation to analyze and discuss within this group. This group discussion is a simulated exercise - so you cannot suddenly put up a show, because evaluators will easily see through you. The group will be given a topic or case study and will be asked to discuss it. But how do you prepare for this group discussion? Let's take a look at different ways you can get ready for this very important exam!

TIPS FOR PREPARATION

you must speak!

First and foremost, you must speak in the Group Discussion. This is the most basic principle. You must be noticed by the panel that is judging you. Many Group Discussion participants will complain that they did not receive a chance to speak. However, you must create the opportunity to have your voice heard. Keeping your mouth shut or just murmuring inaudible words in a Group Discussion is simply unacceptable!

Increase your general knowledge base

Since any topic in the GD is possible, you should increase your knowledge in all general areas. A well-rounded intelligence is a key to success. Often you will find that knowledge in one discipline will help you out in another. Also brush up on your definitions.

Read daily newspapers and magazines.

You must realize that the Group Discussion topics can cover anything under the sun, especially current affairs. Read daily newspapers and magazines to become knowledgeable about hot topics in the economy, politics, technology, science and any sort of world news. Even watching the news on television will help you get a sense of what type of current affairs are going on. You can even search the Internet for the official websites of newspapers that you read - they usually offer an online version of their news. Read up on news events which involve debatable topics or actions. You may recognize whether or not a news story is debatable particularly if there are opinion or editorial articles on it.

Refresh your knowledge of business and politics.

The CAT/MAT/XAT/eCAT is an entrance exam for management programs, so you should know the core concepts of business, management and technology. You should also be well-rounded in political affairs. Try to refresh yourself in the following topics:

- Political ideas and their role in today's government, society and economy (e.g. capitalism, socialism, democracy, bureaucracies)
- Case studies: mortality rates, per capita income, foreign exchange rates
- Economic and political reforms in India
- Common stock market, business and banking terms
- Philosophies and rhetoric
- Current affairs in India, the Middle East, the world
- Social issues
- Effects of globalization

There are many more topics which you need to cover.

Participate in practice group discussion.

Having a mock group discussion is a great way to get practice. Try this out with like-minded friends and you can learn from each other by giving and receiving feedback.

Take a piece of paper and a pen and use them, unless specifically asked by the evaluators not to do so. Before you begin speaking, think through the major issues in the topic in the first 2 minutes. Jot down points or mentally work out a framework for analysis. Start speaking when you are ready to analyse the topic.

If you do not understand the topic, then either ask the group to seek clarification and accept that your ignorance will be obvious to all or else wait. The meaning may become clear after a few minutes of the discussion, when someone else discusses it. Avoid speaking in turn, as it leads to an unnatural discussion. A GD involves a free-flowing exchange of ideas among participants. There will probably be chaos in most competitive GDs because all participants will want to be heard.

CRITICAL FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

Cognitive skills and knowledge

When you speak in the GD, you must focus on the quality of your content (QOC). This will be reflected in the points you make, your knowledge of the relevant subject, and the supporting examples you give to back up your argument.

Comprehension of the core idea

As mentioned before, it's essential to deliver high quality quantity. But to do that, you have to speak on the topic and not deviate too far from it. The panel wants to see if you have identified the crux of the problem, and whether you are offering relevant solutions. The quality of what you are saying is more valuable than the quantity. There is this myth amongst many group discussion participants that the way to succeed in a group discussion is by speaking loudly and at great length. One could not be more wrong - you must have meat in your arguments.

Logical reasoning and clarity of thought

Logical reasoning includes understanding the topic, generating quality arguments and analysis, as well as providing a progressive approach to a justifiable conclusion. Your argument has to make sense. Logic is a necessary attribute for an effective GD participant. You will illustrate qualities of being open-minded and logic-driven, rather than just simply opinionated.

Behavioral and personality skills

Attributes like rapport-building, team membership, participation, patience, assertion and accommodation, amenability and leadership are key. Always be polite. Motivate the other members of the team to speak and do not be abrasive or arrogant. The panel will judge team members for their alertness and presence of mind, problem-solving abilities, ability to work as a team without alienating certain members, and creativity.

Communication skills

Be assertive, but not dominating. You should be able to articulate your thoughts properly as well as understand what others are trying to say. Be prepared with counter arguments for those who hold opposite views to you. Everyone else will state the obvious, so highlight some not-so-obvious points. Your different perspective will be highly appreciated by the panel. Here are some pointers:

- Make sure that your "different" perspective or statement is still relevant to the debate at hand.
- Move the group ahead if it is stuck at one point.
- Be able to take the the discussion into a more fresh and relevant direction.

Your Objectives:

Know what the objective of your group discussion is. Your objective is to have contributed meaningfully in an attempt to help the group reach the right consensus:

- Gaining support or influencing colleagues is the mantra adopted by many successful business leaders.
- Nobody expects a group of ten people with different viewpoints to all achieve a consensus. What matters is the question "did you make attempts to build a consensus?"
- Building a consensus is important because in most work situations, you'll have to work with people in a team, have joint responsibilities and make group decisions.
- Demonstrate that you are capable of working as part of a team.

Opening a discussion

Opening a discussion is high risk-high return strategy. The opening speaker in a group discussion is usually the person who is likely to get the most uninterrupted speaking time, because everyone else will still be trying to understand the basic issues in the topic or are too nervous to be the first one to speak. Evaluators get the best chance to observe these opening speakers.

However, this is a double-edged sword because if the opening speaker makes sense, he will get credit because he has set the discussion in the right direction. But if the first speaker lacks substance, he will attract attention to his shortcomings. He might be marked as a person who speaking without thinking things through first, and speaking only for the sake of speaking. You do not want to be marked as someone who leads the group in the wrong direction.

Remember, speaking first can make or break your GD performance depending on how you handle it. Speak first only if you have enough sensible things to say - otherwise, keep silent and let someone else start.