



# HOW TO STAND OUT AT AN ASSESSMENT CENTRE

# **The CIPD suggests that one-third of employers use assessment centres to find their ideal employees.**

Assessment centres allow hiring managers and HR professionals to go beyond the traditional interview and CV[Resume]overview, to discover which candidate will deliver the best long-term results for the business.

In the past, many companies simply screened CVs and invited individuals to a face-to-face conversation if they seemed appropriate for a role. However, over time, employers discovered that this process wasn't the most effective way of selecting the right people. Assessment centres unearth the real potential of a candidate, and that person's ability to perform in a job, reducing the risk and expense of a poor hire.

---

# What to Expect from an Assessment Centre?

Assessment centres deliver more accurate recruitment processes by allowing interviews to assess existing performance and predict future potential. With assessment centres, employers can:

- See how candidates perform in-person, as well as on paper
- Provide better insight into the daily tasks of the role for candidates
- Build a better employer brand by impressing individuals during the assessment
- Deliver a fair process for hiring that's less subject to bias than the typical interview

Assessment centre experience can vary widely regarding content, length, and activity. Some employers searching for people to fill management positions may place more focus on the group activity portion of their interview and skip the "case study" portion. Organisations attempting to build a better company culture may consider the psychometric testing part of the assessment to be particularly crucial. To prepare for your assessment experience:

- Visit the company's website and learn about what they do, which clients they deal with, and any plans they may have for the organisation. For instance, if a business is expanding, they may be looking for new leaders to support their teams. This means that the assessment centre tasks may concentrate on finding leadership skills.
- Speak to the specialist recruitment company that is listing the professional position on their website. These groups can often give a better overview of the kind of assessments the company has run before.
- List the competencies the business appears to be looking for based on the words they use in their job descriptions like "punctuality," "teamwork," and "accuracy." Once you have your list, write down achievements and ways that you can demonstrate the correct skills during an assessment.

Remember, unless advised otherwise, treat the assessment centre experience like a formal interview in terms of how you present yourself. Wear attire that's appropriate for the business and remember that the length of the assessment centre process can vary depending on the company. Employers and HR teams will be assessing your abilities through a series of tests including:

- In Tray Exercises
  - Presentations
  - Group Tests
  - Psychometric Tests
  - Panel Interviews
  - Case Studies
-

## Preparing for In-Tray Exercises

In-tray exercises are some of the most popular activities used in an assessment centre. These exercises allow assessors to test a range of aptitudes in situations that resemble moments you may find in an actual workplace.

Most In-tray exercises test a specific set of competencies - usually the ones you'll find after an evaluation of your job description. For instance, for management positions, in-tray exercises may look at delegation skills, problem-solving, and the ability to thrive under pressure.

## Excelling at In-Tray Exercises

The key to succeeding with in-tray exercises is knowing which competencies your employer is looking for and emphasising those traits when answering questions or performing tasks. Remember, in-tray exercises will test your ability to:

- Demonstrate your knowledge for the role you're applying for: Make sure you brush up on terminology and highlight any qualifications you may have that's relevant to your sector.
  - Display skills necessary for the job: Look at the responsibilities listed on the job description and prepare to show that you can manage them in a simulated environment. For instance, a salesperson may be asked to complete a transaction with a customer in a specific period.
  - Show your attitudes are correct for the role at hand: Examine the company culture before your assessment centre interview, to ensure that you're conveying the right personality, along with your skills and knowledge.
- 

## During the In-Tray Exercise

During the In-Tray exercise, manage your time carefully. You'll be tested according to a deadline, so it's important to make sure that you don't miss anything or spend too long on each task. A good strategy is to look at everything on the in-tray test at the beginning and sort your jobs into the order that makes sense. This will speed up your performance and show your employer that you're efficient at time management.

Remember that despite the time pressure, you'll also be expected to pay close attention to detail, so double-check anything you do before you hand it in. Also, remember to keep calm and demonstrate the key characteristics you know your employer is looking for. You may even be asked to make notes of the reasons for your decisions or explain your thought process as you complete a task.





## Making Successful Presentations

The presentation portion of the assessment centre examines a candidate's communication skills and how they work with information. Presentation requirements vary depending on the role you apply for, and some companies will send information ahead of time to help people prepare for their presentation.

If you are given instructions prior to the assessment centre day, make sure you read and follow them carefully.

## The Basics for Great Presentations

The first thing to remember about a presentation is that the recruitment team will be examining more than just what you say, they'll also be looking at how you present yourself. Body language is crucial in a presentation, so make sure that you:

- Maintain eye contact regularly with everyone on the panel.
- Use a welcoming smile as often as possible
- Speak clearly and at a measured pace

Remember to keep your head up and your spine straight as you talk and don't rely too heavily on hand gestures, as this can distract your audience. Other points to keep in mind when preparing for your presentation include:

---

### 1. Make Sure You Stick to a Structure

On the assessment centre day, it's natural to feel nervous. If your mind goes blank, it will help to have an excellent presentation structure laid out to guide you through your discussion. Structure is useful for your audience too, as it keeps them focused. Give your presentation a beginning, which includes welcoming the audience, a middle complete with plenty of useful information, and an end where you summarise what you've covered during your discussion. Thank your audience for their attention when you're finished speaking.

### 2. Be Ruthless with Your Content

As you plan your presentation, you're likely to collect more content than you need. With that in mind, it's important to define what you speak about. Remember that your audience won't have too much time to listen to you, as they'll have other candidates to assess also. Too much information can also cause your audience to switch off, so prune everything down to the essentials, focusing on discussing the things that show the competencies your employer is looking for. For instance, consider breaking your presentation down into three crucial points that highlight three characteristics you want your audience to associate with you.

### 3. Practice Makes Perfect

Practicing a presentation on your friends and family might make you feel a little awkward at first, but it's worth it. Practicing your presentation out loud ensures that you're comfortable speaking from memory, with only the occasional prompt from your index cards or screen. Plenty of practice will also ensure that you're comfortable with the timing of the presentation, and how much you need to project your voice to ensure that everyone can hear you. You can also use this time to anticipate the kind of questions you might get from the audience, so you're prepared to answer effectively on the day.



# Standing Out in Group Tests

Group interviews can be one of the most nerve-wracking parts of an assessment centre experience for some candidates. Seeing opponents face-to-face is often intimidating, but it's worth remembering that 40% of interviewers say that lack of confidence was their reason for not taking a candidate further.

It's essential to maintain a memorable presence, even when you're surrounded by other people. If you keep your head up and focus on standing out for the right reasons, you'll improve your chances of getting the role you want.

## How to Succeed in Group Assessments

The first thing to remember about your group tests is that employers and hiring managers will be looking for evidence that you can work as part of a team. Though the people around you are your competition, you'll need to be able to collaborate with them, so don't focus too much on trying to outshine those individuals.

Don't look at the other candidates as threats for the time being. In some companies, there may be multiple vacancies to fill at one time, which means that the people you work with during the group assessment might be your colleagues in the future. Rather than focusing on the competition, use the following three strategies to stand out.

### 1. Dress to Impress

In crowds of potential employees, HR professionals will be looking for the people who made the most effort visually before they even start to assess skills and competencies. Even if the invite to the assessment centre doesn't mention anything about "professional dress," assume that you'll be expected to look your best. Properly shined shoes and classy clothes show that you're invested in the job, and you know how to make a good impression.

### 2. Make Yourself Heard

If you're not a naturally confident person, then you may be tempted to just blend into the background when other people in your group start taking charge. Remember, you don't have to force yourself into the leadership position on every task, but you do need to make yourself heard. Speak up and give your opinion on as many things as possible. Make a significant impact wherever you can by taking the initiative and getting ahead of the crowd. For instance, if someone needs to volunteer for a particularly tricky task, put your hand up and show your knowledge.

### 3. Do Your Research

Make sure you're prepared for the day by gathering as much information as you can before you go to the assessment centre. Be the person in your group that knows everything about the history of the company you want to work for and ensure that you always have the list of competencies your employer is looking for in mind. In a group test, the person who is most well-read and informed about the business will be the one that stands out the most.

---

# Practising Psychometric Tests

Psychometric tests are another thing that shows up frequently in assessment centres.

Today's employers need to make sure that the people they're hiring don't just have the right background and knowledge to thrive in a role -they also have the correct attitude. Company culture is growing increasingly crucial today, and psychometric tests provide a more rounded view of how candidates will fit with the existing culture in a company.

There are many different kinds of psychometric test that an employer may use, including:

- Aptitude tests: These aim to assess specific sets of skills, such as verbal reasoning, inductive reasoning, and numerical reasoning.
- Skills tests: These assessments look at how quickly someone can learn a new skill and carry out an important task using that talent.
- Personality tests: Through personality tests, employers can evaluate your suitability for a role based on your behaviour and attitude.

## How to Prepare for Psychometric Tests

The types of psychometric test a business uses in the assessment centre phase will depend on what they're looking for in an applicant. For instance, if a company is looking for someone who will improve their existing company culture, they may use the Myers Briggs personality tests to find people with the right style of behaviour.

Ask your [sector] recruitment company what kind of tests the business plans on using, then focus on getting yourself into good mental shape. This means making sure you get plenty of rest before the assessment, and it may also involve taking measures to reduce stress, like practicing meditation or getting more exercise. Once you're mentally ready:

## Practice Psychometric Test Questions

Practice makes perfect when it comes to every point in the psychometric testing process. Though it's difficult to alter your personality, you can focus on bringing the best parts of your attitude out during a personality test. For instance, when you've found the key competencies and attitudes that your employer is looking for by examining the job description, ask yourself how you would respond to questions to show those characteristics.

Aptitude tests and skills-based tests are much easier to practice, as there are plenty of mock tests available online. Just remember that the questions you'll find on testing

---



sites will usually be quite general, so it may help to alter them slightly to make them more relevant.

Practice tests will allow you to familiarise yourself with the format and content of the assessments your employers will use to determine your aptitude for the job. The more practice you get, the more comfortable you feel when the clock starts ticking on the day.

## Making the Right Impression at Panel Interviews

The panel interview is the part of the assessment centre experience that's likely to feel most familiar to many candidates. Preparing for these interviews is like getting ready for a standard interview. It involves:

- Researching the company to familiarise yourself with their values
- Reading through the job description to find key competencies
- Practising answers to sector-specific and career-specific questions

Going into your panel interview, be prepared to speak about your significant accomplishments and the things you did in previous roles. If you're told who will be interviewing you before the day, it's worth researching each person and their background with the company so you can demonstrate that you've done your homework when it's time to answer questions.

A few other ways to succeed in panel interviews include:

### 1. Making Regular Eye Contact

Good body language is essential during any interview process, but it's particularly important with a panel interview. You'll need to maintain eye contact with everyone in the room but remember to give extra attention to the person who asks you the question.

Angle your body towards the individual who asks you the question during the interview but smile and look towards the other people in the room occasionally, as you answer too. This will show that you know how to act in a group environment.

### 2. Read the Room and Engage with Everyone

When you first enter the room for the panel interview, introduce yourself, and shake hands with everyone in the room. If you've done your research on the people who are interviewing you, then you can share an anecdote or two about what you've learned. For instance, "Hi Mr Smith, congratulations on your recent award."

Remember, you don't know who will have the most decision-making power here, so ensure that you respond to everyone who speaks to you equally, and don't give one person more attention than another, regardless of who acts like they're in charge.

---

### 3. Exude Confidence

All interviewers in a panel environment will be looking for someone who feels comfortable surrounded by their peers. An excellent way to show your confidence is to aim for a conversational atmosphere during the discussion. Don't answer questions robotically, connect with your interviewers by acknowledging other people in your answers.

For instance, if someone asks questions about your ability to work in a [sector] team, you might say: "As Jack mentioned earlier, it's important to get the whole team involved in a project. I would accomplish that by..."

## How to Succeed with Case Studies

Finally, case studies are like In-Tray assessments because they simulate the type of problems you'd encounter if you got the position you're applying for. Most companies use case studies to assess things like analytical thinking, organisational skills, and judgement.

To thrive in a case study, you'll need to solve an issue that your employer or hiring manager present, showing your ability to think fast on your feet and stay calm under pressure. Remember, you'll be presented with the information you need to solve the problem, and you may be working either as an individual, or part of a group.

## Preparing for a Case Study

To excel in a case study, make sure that you're completely clear on the objectives that you need to accomplish. Don't be afraid to double-check things with the HR team if you're not sure about what you need to do, as they'll prefer this to a candidate who gives a presentation that misses the point.

If you're working on a case study as part of a team, remember not to dominate or dismiss the views of other candidates, but don't let your voice be drowned out either. Plan your time carefully, and make sure that you use the opportunities you have to demonstrate the competencies that you know your employer is looking for.

Keep in mind that your assessor won't just be looking at the conclusions you make with your case study, but how you came to the decisions that you made too.

---

# Bonus Advice for Thriving in the Assessment Centre

The assessment centre isn't going away any time soon. These interviewing strategies are hugely popular with employers who want to ensure that they're selecting the right people as part of their recruitment strategy.

The best thing you can do to prepare for an assessment centre is, do your homework. If you find out what the company values, and the competencies that they're looking for in an employee before you begin the interview process, you'll know how to present yourself in everything from the group assessment to the panel interview.

Remember, you can also research the kind of tests that your would-be employer might use and practice them in advance to improve your chances of success. Presentations in front of your family and practice psychometric tests are a great way to get ahead of the competition. A few additional pointers to keep with you as you go into your assessment centre include:

- **Be Authentic:** While it's important to showcase the competencies and attitudes that your assessor wants, don't forget to show your unique personality too. If you fake it too much, your potential employer is likely to pick up on it.
- **Pay attention to detail:** When you're evaluating the job description, following the instructions on your tests and more, make sure that you pay close attention to the details. The last thing you want is to misunderstand something and make the wrong impression.

- **Stay in touch:** Don't forget to stay connected after the interview. Dropping a quick thank-you note into the business to let people know that you appreciated the opportunity is a great way to make yourself stand out when the questions are over.

An assessment centre might be nerve-wracking, but it's also an incredible way to prove that you're right for a role. Don't be afraid to let yourself shine during your next assessment.





## CLAYTON RECRUITMENT

We understand that while talent is your greatest asset – it can also be your scarcest resource – which is why you need a recruitment partner with the market expertise, insight and network to deliver the right people at the right time.

Clayton Recruitment has been partnering with organisations across the local, regional and national market for over three decades and during that time has built up an enviable reputation for trust and reliability. We provide an experienced and credible voice in the market by being able to demonstrate a detailed knowledge of the talent agenda.

Talent is all about people, and just like you, our consultants are true experts in their field with a real drive for excellence which informs everything they do.

With specialist divisions covering Commercial, Financial, Industrial, Engineering and Nursing appointments, on both a permanent and temporary basis, Clayton Recruitment is the only name you'll ever need, and what's more – we are nice people to do business with!

## LET'S KEEP IN TOUCH

Keep up to date with the very latest industry news and insight, by connecting with us on our social channels:





**CLAYTON**  
RECRUITMENT

Trinity House  
88-96 Market Street West  
Preston  
PR1 2EU

T: 01772 259 121  
E: [enquiries@clayton-recruitment.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@clayton-recruitment.co.uk)  
W: [clayton-recruitment.co.uk](http://clayton-recruitment.co.uk)