
UNIT 4 GROUP DISCUSSIONS

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

Group discussions are part of the admission procedure in many Institutes of Higher Education. Besides, they also play a major role in the recruiting process for various administrative and high level posts in Business organizations. The objective of this Unit is to find answers to questions like:

What is it that makes Group Discussions an important tool of assessment?

- What is a Group Discussion?
- What does Group Discussions assess?
- Methods and procedures in Group Discussions.
- Group Discussion skills.
- Language for Group Discussions.
- Assessment Criteria

4.1 WARM UP



How efficiently and effectively people get along with one another, respect each others' ideas, and resolve their inevitable professional and linguistic differences is going to result in success or failure.

To what extent do you agree with the above statement?

4.2 READING

Check Your Progress 1

Complete the following text on Group Discussions by inserting the appropriate sentences from the ones given below the passage in jumbled order.

Skills Needed at the Workplace-I

The 21st century has witnessed an increased focus and dependence on technology. Consequently we spend a lot of time in front of our computers.

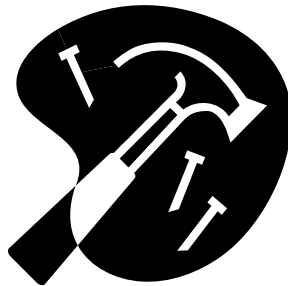
1. _____
_____ Regardless of the use of Information technology, major decisions and sales are made on the basis of interpersonal communication.

2. _____
_____.

In the world of Sales, it's often said that people don't just buy products; they buy concepts sold to them through the ideas and feelings of their salesperson.

3. _____
_____. Some of the most important interpersonal communication skills necessary to communicate effectively face-to-face include speaking and listening, establishing rapport, and understanding and accommodating differences when communicating across personality, gender, and cultural lines.

4. _____
_____.



A Group Discussion is a test of the interpersonal communication skills of a candidate.

5. _____
_____.

It assesses the capacity of a person to interact constructively as member of a group and to make a meaningful contribution to the discussion. You can do so only if you have a good knowledge base, the ability to structure your arguments logically and the skill to communicate your ideas effectively.

- A. Plain and simple, people like to do business with people they like.
- B. Hence the importance of interpersonal communicative skills cannot be overstated.
- C. These precisely are the skills required for Group Discussions.
- D. It is often used as a tool for evaluating the effectiveness of a person in a group activity.
- E. If we're not careful, we may lose the ability to communicate effectively face-to-face.

Now check your answers with the Answer key.

Types of Group Discussions

1. A topic is given to the group by the GD Coordinator and the participants are asked to discuss it for a duration of 15-20 minutes. Sometimes participants are asked to decide a topic by themselves. They are then given 3 – 5 minutes to think about the topic before the GD actually starts.
2. A printed case study is given to the group and the candidates are given time to read the case before they actually begin the discussion. In this method of group discussion the following procedure is recommended:
 - Enumerate the facts of the case
 - Define symptoms
 - Identify problem
 - Suggest solution / solutions

Check Your Progress 2

Which one out of the two types of discussions would require more preparation time and why?

Check your answer with the Answer Key.



Some more Food for Thought

- Be assertive but not aggressive
- Ensure you get enough airtime
- Build up a good knowledge base
- Structure your ideas logically - convey your ideas convincingly
- Contribute meaningfully to achieve the right consensus
- Speak first only if you have something sensible to say
- Display leadership by
 - Initiating discussion, interpreting topic, carrying discussion forward
 - Not allowing high performers to overshadow non-performers
 - Giving a patient ear to dissenting views
 - Not allowing the group to drift away from the main topic
- Avoid verbosity and wordiness
- Give examples to illustrate and substantiate your arguments
- Use a conversational style & be friendly – interact constructively
- Be attentive throughout the GD – be a good listener
- Help restore order in times of chaos
- Provide a fresh direction when the group is floundering
- Try to resolve contradictions
- Synthesize arguments
- Summarize the discussion at the end
- Give the right signals through your body language – show attentiveness by looking into the eyes of the speaker, lean forward to listen
- Address the speaker, not the moderator
- Thank the moderators while walking out of the hall
- Do not ask them to comment on your performance

Check Your Progress 3

Read the above mentioned do's and don'ts carefully again. Pick out the 5 don'ts from these given tips. The first one is done for you as an example.

1. *Do not be aggressive.*
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

4.3 WRITING SKILLS

Check Your Progress 4

Elaborate upon the following tips listed above by explaining them in your own words. The first one is done for you as an example.

1. Be assertive but not aggressive
State your ideas and views clearly and emphatically without allowing others to dominate you or prevent you from asserting yourself. Be an active, vocal participant and not a mere listener. But at the same time do not go overboard and become condescending or contemptuous. Nor should you prevent others from stating their viewpoints. That would be aggressiveness.
2. Ensure you get enough airtime.
3. Build up a good knowledge base.

Now check what you have written with what is given in the Answer Key.

4.4 LISTENING: HOW TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN A GROUP DISCUSSION?

Listen to a speaker telling you about how to be successful in a group discussion.

Check Your Progress 5

On the basis of what the speaker says, state whether the following statements are True or False:

1. You must contribute towards reaching a consensus.
2. In order to be heard you must speak for at least 15 minutes.
3. You can make a meaningful contribution even if you do not know much about the topic being discussed.
4. A fish market scenario is one where each one tries to talk at the same time and emphasize his/ her point of view.
5. If you fail to contribute towards reaching a consensus it means you are not very good at team work.
6. A good listener agrees with what others say.
7. In the end you must summarize only your own point of view.
8. You must feel free to express your disagreement if you do not see eye to eye with another participant.

Check your answers with the Answer Key.

4.5 STUDY SKILLS

As you are aware, Group Discussions are often used as part of selection/ recruitment procedure by Institutions and Business Organizations.

Here is a list of some of the abilities that the evaluators look for in participants. Do you think you can add at least two more to the list? You may get some clues from the section 'Some Food for Thought'.

- Intelligence
- Depth of understanding
- Ability to think independently
- Ability to articulate thoughts
- Ability to appreciate another's point of view
- Ability to relate to other people

Assessment Criteria



The participants of Group Discussions are evaluated by a panel of experts. Here are most of the areas on which they would mark you on their evaluation sheets. It would be extremely helpful to keep these in mind when you participate in Group Discussions.

- Command over spoken English – it should be logical, coherent, correct, appropriate

- Knowledge base – authentic information – genuine facts and figures
- Convincing power – cogent, decent and constructively forceful attitude
- Discourse management – coping with twists and turns of arguments
- Body Language – eye contact, body posture, attentiveness
- Maturity – candidate must not ‘bully’ others or take undue advantage to prove himself/herself a ‘leader’.
- Listening – intelligent and analytical
- Supplementing – responding and adding to what another has said before initiating a fresh turn
- Initiative and Assertiveness

Beneficial Team Behaviour

- Initiate discussions
- Seek information and opinions
- Suggest procedures for reaching a goal / consensus
- Clarify or elaborate ideas
- Summarize
- Act as a gate-keeper, direct conversational traffic, avoid simultaneous conversations
- Subdue dominant talkers, make room for reserved and shy people
- Keep the discussion from digressing
- Be flexible and creative in resolving differences

A consolidated task based on the inputs given in this section is given in the speaking section.

4.6 LANGUAGE FOCUS

Here is some helpful language for group discussions:

■ **Stating an opinion**

- It seems to me...
- In my view...
- I tend to think...
- Its obvious that...
- I believe....
- Clearly,.....

■ **Interrupting**

- Excuse me, may I ask for a clarification on this...
- If I may interrupt...
- Sorry to interrupt but.....

■ **Handling Interruptions**

- Sorry, please let me finish.....
- If I may finish what I am saying.....
- Could you please allow me to complete what I'm saying.....

■ **Moving the discussion on**

- Can we go on to think about.....
- I think we should now move on to consider.....

■ **Expressing Agreement**

- I totally agree
- I agree entirely
- I quite agree

- I couldn't agree more
- Absolutely / precisely / exactly
- I think you're right

- **Expressing disagreement**
 - I don't agree at all
 - I totally disagree
 - I think quite differently on this
 - I don't really think so
 - I'm afraid I can't agree with you there

- **Checking comprehension / reformulating**
 - To put that another way...
 - If I follow you correctly...
 - So what you're saying is...
 - Does that mean...
 - Are you saying...

- **Making a suggestion**
 - I suggest that....
 - We could.....
 - Perhaps we should...
 - It might be worth....
 - What about.....?
 - Why don't we.....?

4.7 VOCABULARY

Check Your Progress 6

Read the text and use the right form of the word at the end of each line to form a word that fits in the numbered space in the same line. The first one is done for you as an example.

The 1 **surest** way of antagonizing others in the GD as well as the examiner (**sure**)

is to appoint yourself as a de facto 2 _____ of the group. Do not try to (**chair**)

impose a system whereby everyone gets a chance to speak in turn. A GD is meant to be a free 3 _____ discussion. Let it proceed naturally. Do not (**flow**)

ever try to take a vote on the topic. A vote is no substitute for discussion.

Do not address only one or two persons when 4 _____. Maintain eye contact (**speak**)

with as many members of the group as possible. This will involve others in what you are saying and increase your 5 _____ of carrying them with you. (**chance**)
Do this even if you are 6 _____ a specific point raised by one person. (**answer**)

Word Collocations

In the English language many words occur in groups or pairs naturally or habitually. These are called word collocations. Example: a *quick temper*. The exercise that follows has collocations with verbs. The first one is done for you as an example.

2. Combine the words in the two columns to make word collocations.

- | | |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Build | eye contact |
| 2. Restore | arguments |
| 3. Take | ideas convincingly |
| 4. Resolve | contradictions |
| 5. Synthesize | dissenting viewpoints |
| 6. Accommodate | responsibility |
| 7. Maintain | a consensus |
| 8. Summarize | order |
| 9. Provide | decisions |
| 10. Convey | a fresh direction |
| 11. Accept | your objective |
| 12. Define | the discussion |

Answer: 1. Build a consensus

4.8 SPEAKING

Practice your group discussion skills by arranging to meet with your study partners. Select any of these topics and conduct your discussion. Remember to apply the tips we have given you, the do's and don'ts as well as the formulaic language given in the unit. Ask someone to assess you on the basis of the assessment criteria given in the unit. Some excerpts of a possible model are given for the first topic.

1. What ails Indian sports?

Speaker 1: *There is no doubt about the fact that Indian sports has come a long way from what it was in the early days of Independence. However, we also cannot deny that looking at our population and potential, we Indians have not achieved much in the area of Sports. I am of the view that lack of infrastructure is the biggest problem that we face. This is particularly true of smaller towns and the countryside.....*

Speaker 2: *I quite agree with what you say about the lack of facilities in small places. But don't you think that a lot of the facilities available in the bigger towns are underutilized?.....*

Speaker 3: *I'm afraid I don't really agree with you there. Many children wish to make use of the infrastructure but the professional sports persons and sometimes the administrators do not really allow everyone to make use of the facilities. Besides the fee for some of these stadiums is.....*

Speaker 4: *If I may add here, that besides lack of infrastructure, there is also a great deal of political interference in sports. On many occasions the deserving players are not selected. For example take the case of*

2. Is coalition politics here to stay?
3. Should colas be banned for the safety of public health?
4. The cable TV invasion.
5. Education and success – is there a correlation?

4.9 GRAMMAR:LINKING WORDS

This passage on whether it is a good strategy to be an opening speaker in a group discussion has some important linking words missing. These may be relative pronouns, conjunctions, conditionals or determiners.

Check Your Progress 7

Complete the paragraph with the words from the box.

Therefore	otherwise	or
who	and	if

In most GD's the opening speaker is the person 1_____ is likely to get the maximum uninterrupted airtime. The reason is simple. At the start most other participants in the GD are still trying to understand the basic issues in the topic, 2_____are too nervous to speak 3_____are waiting for someone else to start. 4_____ the evaluators get the best chance to observe the opening speaker. Now this is a double-edged sword. 5_____the opening speaker talks sense, naturally he will get credit because he opened and took the group in the right direction.6_____ on the other hand, the first speaker doesn't make too much sense, he will attract the undivided attention of the evaluators to his shortcomings. He will be marked as a person 7_____ speaks without thinking merely for the sake of speaking. He will be seen as someone who leads the group in the wrong direction 8_____ does not make a positive contribution to the group. So remember, speaking first is a high-risk high-return strategy. It can make 9_____ mar your GD performance depending how you handle it. Speak first only10_____ you have something sensible to say. 11_____ keep quiet and let someone else start.

Confirm your answers by checking with the Answer key.

4.10 PRONUNCIATION

Here are some more collocations. You can hear them on the tape. Repeat as you hear each one.

1. cost control
2. market share
3. express an opinion
4. draw a conclusion
5. break the deadlock
6. illustrate the point
7. beside the point
8. made any headway
9. reach a compromise
10. for the time being

4.11 SUMMARY

In this Unit you learnt about:

1. What is a Group Discussion?
2. The importance of GD as a tool for assessment
3. Types of Group Discussions
4. Assessment criteria for GDs
5. Language used in GDs
6. Do's and don'ts for GDs
7. How to take part in an actual group discussion
8. Word collocations

4.12 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. M V Rodriques, *Effective Business communication*. Concept Publishing Company
2. Lyn R Clark, Kenneth Zimmer, Joseph Tinervia. *Business English and Communication* McGraw Hill International.

4.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Reading

Check Your Progress 1

The 21st century has witnessed an increased focus and dependence on technology. Consequently we spend a lot of time in front of our computers. **E. If we're not careful, we may lose the ability to communicate effectively face-to-face.** Regardless of the use of Information technology, major decisions and sales are made on the basis of interpersonal communication. **B. Hence the importance of interpersonal communicative skills cannot be overstated.**

In the world of Sales, it's often said that people don't just buy products; they buy concepts sold to them through the ideas and feelings of their salesperson. **A. Plain and simple, people like to do business with people they like.** Some of the most important interpersonal communication skills necessary to communicate effectively face-to-face include speaking and listening, establishing rapport, and understanding and accommodating differences when communicating across personality, gender, and cultural lines. **C. These precisely are the skills required for Group Discussions.**

A Group Discussion is a test of the interpersonal communication skills of a candidate. **D. It is often used as a tool for evaluating the effectiveness of a person in a group activity.** It assesses the capacity of a person to interact constructively as member of a group and to make a meaningful contribution to the discussion. You can do so only if you have a good knowledge base, the ability to structure your arguments logically and the skill to communicate your ideas effectively.

Check Your Progress 2

Types of group discussions

More preparation time will be required for the Case Study based group discussion because the candidates need to be given time to read and understand the case before they begin their discussion.

Check Your Progress 3

1. Do not be aggressive.
2. Do not allow high performers to overshadow low performers.
3. Do not allow the group to drift away from the main topic.
4. Do not be verbose and wordy.
5. Do not ask moderators to comment on your performance.

Writing

Check Your Progress 4

2. Ensure you get enough airtime

It is for you to make sure that you take the opportunity to present your viewpoints and arguments and speak for enough time to make a creative and meaningful contribution to the discussion. The airtime is the amount of time you speak.

4. Build up a good knowledge base.

Building up a wide knowledge base means increasing your knowledge and general awareness so that you are well equipped with information and viewpoints. This can be done by doing a lot of general reading from newspapers, magazines and books. Listening to or watching programmes on current affairs, social welfare, economics, commerce, environment, etc can also be extremely useful.

Listening

Tape script

In order to succeed at any unstructured group discussion, you must define what your objective in the group is. A good definition of your objective is - to be seen to have contributed meaningfully in an attempt to achieve the right consensus. The key words in this definition are 'seen', 'meaningfully', and 'attempt'.

Let us understand what each of these imply in terms of action points :

The first implication is that merely making a meaningful contribution in an attempt to achieve consensus is not enough. You have to be seen by the evaluator to have made a meaningful contribution in an attempt to build the right consensus. In other words, you must ensure that you are heard by the group. If the group hears you so will the evaluator. You must get at least some airtime. If you are not a very assertive person you will have to simply learn to be assertive for those 15 minutes.

The second important implication is that making just any sort of contribution is not enough. Your contribution has to be meaningful. A meaningful contribution suggests that you have a good knowledge base, are able to structure arguments logically and are a good communicator. These are qualities that are desired by all evaluators.

One way of deciding what sort of contribution is meaningful at what point of time is to follow two simple rules.

First, in times of chaos, a person who restores order to the group is appreciated. Your level of participation in a fish market kind of scenario can be low, but your degree of influence must never be low. In other words, you must make positive contributions every

time you speak, and not merely speak for the sake of speaking. The second rule is applicable when the group is floundering. In this situation a person who provides a fresh direction to the group is given credit.

The third implication is that you must be clearly seen to be attempting to build a consensus. Nobody expects a group of ten people, all with different points of view on a controversial subject to actually achieve a consensus. But did you make the attempt to build a consensus? The reason why an attempt to build a consensus is important is because in most work situations you will have to work with people in a team, accept joint responsibilities and take decisions as a group. You must demonstrate the fact that you are capable and inclined to work as part of a team. What are the ways that you can try to build consensus?

Firstly, you don't just talk. You also listen. You must realize that other people also may have valid points to make. You should not only try to persuade other people to your point of view, but also come across as a person who has an open mind and appreciates the valid points of others.

You must try and resolve contradictions and arguments of others in the group. You must synthesize arguments and try and achieve a unified position in the group. Try and summarize the discussion at the end. In the summary do not merely restate your point of view; also accommodate dissenting viewpoints. If the group did not reach a consensus, say so in your summary. You must carry people with you.

One last point. You must not agree with another participant in the group merely for the sake of achieving consensus. If you disagree, say so. You are not there to attempt to build just any consensus. You have to attempt to build the right consensus.

Check Your Progress 5

- | | |
|--|-------|
| 1. You must contribute towards reaching a consensus. | TRUE |
| 2. In order to be heard you must speak for at least 15 minutes. | FALSE |
| 3. You can make a meaningful contribution even if you do not know much about the topic being discussed. | FALSE |
| 4. A fish market scenario is one where each one tries to talk at the same time and emphasize his/ her point of view. | TRUE |
| 5. If you fail to contribute towards reaching a consensus it means you are not very good at team work. | TRUE |
| 6. A good listener agrees with what others say. | FALSE |
| 7. In the end you must summarize only your own point of view. | FALSE |

Check Your Progress 6

Vocabulary

- The **surest** way of antagonizing others in the GD as well as the examiner is to appoint yourself as a de facto **chairperson** of the group. Do not try to impose a system whereby everyone gets a chance to speak in turn. A GD is meant to be a free **flowing** discussion. Let it proceed naturally. Do not ever try to take a vote on the topic. A vote is no substitute for discussion.

Do not address only one or two persons when **speaking**. Maintain eye contact with as many members of the group as possible. This will involve others in what you are saying and increase your **chances** of carrying them with you. Do this even if you are **answering** a specific point raised by one person.

2. Word Collocations

- | | |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Build | a consensus |
| 2. Restore | order |
| 3. Take | decisions |
| 4. Resolve | contradictions |
| 5. Synthesize | arguments |
| 6. Accommodate | dissenting viewpoints |
| 7. Maintain | eye contact |
| 8. Summarize | the discussion |
| 9. Provide | a fresh direction |
| 10. Convey | ideas convincingly |
| 11. Accept | responsibility |
| 12. Define | your objective |

Check Your Progress 7

Linking Words

In most GD's the opening speaker is the person 1 **who** is likely to get the maximum uninterrupted airtime. The reason is simple. At the start most other participants in the GD are still trying to understand the basic issues in the topic, 3 **or** are too nervous to speak 4 **and** are waiting for someone else to start. 5 **Therefore** the evaluators get the best chance to observe the opening speaker. Now this is a double-edged sword. 6 **If** the opening speaker talks sense naturally he will get credit because he opened and took the group in the right direction. 7 **If** on the other hand the first speaker doesn't have too much sense to say, he will attract the undivided attention of the evaluators to his shortcomings. He will be marked as a person 8 **who** speaks without thinking merely for the sake of speaking, as someone who leads the group in the wrong direction 9 **and** does not make a positive contribution to the group.

So remember, speaking first is a high-risk high return strategy. It can make 10 **or** mar your GD performance depending how you handle it. Speak first only 11 **if** you have something sensible to say. 12 **Otherwise** keep quiet and let someone else start.

Pronunciation (tape script)

1. 'cost con'trol
2. 'market 'share
3. ex'press an o'pinion
4. 'draw a conc'lusion
5. 'break the 'deadlock
6. 'illustrate the 'point
7. be'side the 'point
8. make any 'headway
9. reach a 'compromise
10. for the 'time 'being

This is where the stress would be in any sentence with these collocations.