

Soft Skills
Session No : 11
Topic: Group Discussion: Non-Verbal Skills

A large number of MBA aspirants prepare passionately for important GD topics and appropriate answers to some of the common interview questions. However, shocking as it may be, what you speak during the procedure carries only a part of the entire weightage that the process holds.

What interviewers and GD panel members use to evaluate your domain knowledge and personality is more than the words you speak. The panel members and interviewers keenly observe the non-verbal cues of the candidates.

The most commonly and casually cited study on the relative importance of verbal and nonverbal messages in communication is by Prof. Albert Mehrabian of the University of California. In the 1970s, his studies suggested that we overwhelmingly deduce our feelings, attitudes, and beliefs about what someone says not by the actual words spoken, but by the speaker's body language and tone of voice. He quantified this tendency: words, tone of voice, and body language respectively account for 7%, 38%, and 55% of one's communication. "The non-verbal elements are particularly important for communicating feelings and attitude, especially when they are incongruent: if words and body language disagree, one tends to believe the body language."

The Importance of Non-Verbal Cues in a Group discussion

It shows agreement/disagreement: Not only through your words you can show your agreement or disagreement to a particular point, your body language and non-verbal expressions also has the power to demonstrate it. Nodding of the head, waving of hands and the movement of your face can tell clearly whether you are agreeing to some point or not. A simple nod of the head shows that you are validating or approving someone's point.

Hand Movements/Gestures: Suppose someone is giving a presentation, but his hands are pulled behind tightly and closed. How would it look like? It will seem as if he has just gobbled all the information and throwing it out. Will you feel interested in such presentation? Probably not. So, moderate hand movements and gestures will make others feel that you yourself are well aware of the topic that you are going to present.

Paying Attention: When you maintain an eye contact, it shows that you are listening to what the other person is saying. And when you do not maintain eye contact, it somehow shows your distracted mind during a group discussion, which may have a negative outcome.

Your Interest/Inclination: You believe it or not, but your body language reveals whether you are taking a keen interest in the discussion or not. If you are crossing your arms or not maintaining proper eye contact or look here and there instead of paying attention to the discussion, this means you are not taking interest. So, check that.

Your Voice Tone/Pitch: This also sets the tone of the discussion in a right or wrong manner. I met some people whose normal voice seems like they are arguing with someone whereas some people may have a very feeble voice and you might find it difficult to listen to them properly. So be aware of your tone and pitch to create the right impact.

Facial Expression: Our face is very expressive if we know how to utilize it in a correct way. All the feelings including sadness, happiness, anger, disgust, fear, panic – are visible on our face to an extent. So, smile, have a twinkle in your eye, avoid and shrinking of eyebrows. These are all non-verbal cues to your emotions during the discussion besides pointing to your agreement or disagreement with the points being discussed.

Body Language: Things to Consider

Smile: A smiling face portrays exuberance and eagerness and it is a good way to impress your interviewers and the panel members of the group discussion. A smiling and happy demeanour shows that you are looking forward to the discussion. But, don't go overboard with it, as an artificial or oversized smile can have the wrong effect. An experienced interviewer will know if you are acting or forcing the smile. It is good to smile when you actually mean it rather than grinning constantly without any reason.

Be Careful of Personal Space

Individual cultures and faiths in the different candidates who come for admission to the MBA program tend to make them different in all aspects including an appropriate personal space. Some people may feel comfortable speaking only inches from the other person while others may need a decent space. When sitting in a group discussion, you must ensure that you respect the personal space that the candidate sitting beside you. Similarly, when in front of your interviewer, be careful of how far or close you sit.

Be Expressive and Open

Your physical gestures must be expressive and open. You must try to engage the members by gesturing positively such as keeping your palms straight and open which demonstrates honesty. Never bang your hand on the table and avoid pointing fingers to make a point during the discussion and personal interview.

Demonstrate Inquisitiveness

Maintaining an eye contact and nodding your head are the best ways to show your eagerness or interest in an interview as well as the group discussion. The panel will appreciate that you are actively engaged in the discussion and paying attention to what the others are saying. Lack of eye contact and other listening cues would suggest your disinterest in the interview and weaken your chances to succeed.

Online Tips:

Background and Surrounding: You should have a white background. Keep the surrounding clean and clutter free.

Placement of Phone/Laptop: Put your phone or laptop in a stable place, so that the screen does not move. Look at the lens/ camera of the phone or laptop and not the screen, that ways you maintain 'eye contact'. Ensure proper Light.

Greet: Start confidently and with a good opening. Smile and say "thank you" at the end. Always Sit straight with the spine erect. Do not lean back on the chair.

Grooming: You should be dressed in formals and pay attention to your grooming. Girls should tie up their hair or ensure hair is neat if open; With a little makeup; minimum jewellery. Boys should have neat and short hair. Boys should be neatly shaved.

General Tips: Manage your gestures. Talk with confidence. Sound enthusiastic and motivated. Speak clearly, slowly and open your mouth well, while speaking, this will help you to speak clearly.

Soft Skills
Session No: 12
Group Discussion: Assertive Skills

We have all heard that one has to be assertive and not aggressive during Group Discussions. There is a very thin line that separates both these behaviours. How do we recognise that line and make sure we balance it well? Let us first try and define the two terms.

As per the Oxford dictionary, Aggression (noun) means “feelings of anger or antipathy resulting in hostile or violent behaviour; readiness to attack or confront.” Assertion (noun) means, “a confident and forceful statement of fact or belief.” We can say that aggression is hostile and offensive behaviour which is hard to accept while assertiveness is a quality that suggests confident behaviour. The good news is Assertiveness is a learnable skill that can be mastered with effort. So, how can one be assertive without being aggressive?

An assertive person uses a confident and balanced tone while talking, is polite and courteous towards others throughout the discussion. Asserts own viewpoint but does not dismiss others’ opinion. Uses polite and convincing language to win over others (for example: I beg to differ, I understand your point but, I’m sorry but I may have to disagree with what you say, I think we have different views on this, etc.) Listens carefully before accepting or contradicting others’ arguments. Behaves as a mature individual, shows tolerance and accepts disagreement/ differing viewpoints. Motivates the introvert and quiet ones in the group to speak up. Doesn’t give in easily to manipulation or bullying by others. Shows confidence and a positive attitude.

Traits of Aggressive behaviour include: Raising the voice, almost screaming – with an intention of dominating others. Wagging index finger at others in a threatening way while making a point or disagreeing. Using body language – tone, gestures, postures, narrowing eyes, etc., to bully others. Showing frustration in a violent/aggressive/offensive/rude manner. Non-acceptance of others’ comments/viewpoints/arguments/disagreements. Using threatening or insulting language (for example: I don’t care what you say/think, I don’t like your opinion, I strongly disagree, You don’t know anything, You’re completely wrong, You’re foolish to think..., etc.) Not listening to others or giving them a chance to speak.

Need for Assertive Skills During Group Discussion

Interpersonal skills as per recent trends are as important as experience if not more. In fact, 94% of the hiring managers will prefer an employee with less experience but excellent interpersonal skills who can share the relevant points convincingly.

Developing assertive skills is useful for everyday life as we regularly find ourselves having discussions amongst friends, family, and colleagues. These may vary from very informal chats about day-to-day matters, to more serious topics, for example a discussion about a recent current affairs issue or a problem solution discussion.

More importantly, group discussions are increasingly being used in the job market as a part of the selection process.

Assertive skills for group discussions

To be able to participate in a group discussion successfully and effectively, there are some minimum parameters we should follow and develop our assertive abilities.

Ability to Analyze the topic

This skill can be developed by examining the topic, analyzing or mind-mapping all of the possible relevant sub-topics one could speak about.

Ability to Convince or Persuade

This skill is often checked by recruiters more so for customer relations or sales job profiles comes – used to assess the decision-making abilities as well.

Control over emotions

In case the group discussion is on a controversial topic, students may be asked to decide whether they agree, disagree or have no opinion, making notes on their main arguments to support their viewpoint. It is important in such discussions to keep voices low and try to control emotions as far as possible. Key is assertion and not aggression.

Support

One of the most important things for students is to learn when it is and isn't appropriate to interrupt and how to do it. Very often students will talk over each other in an effort to get their point across and forget to listen.

Interruption is not a good practice unless a particular speaker has been dominating the discussion for too long, what the speaker is saying is completely irrelevant to the topic, or you don't understand the point he / she has made. However, even in these situations, there are some examples of polite interjections such as 'Can I just add something here?', 'Sorry I'd just like to clarify something,' etc.

Assertive Communication

Assertiveness is an important skill to develop, not only as a part of the group discussions being participated in but as a general communication skill. Assertive communication skills form an important part of enabling relationships – professional and personal. As a part of developing assertiveness, try to introspect and think about usually how you react when someone unfairly criticizes your work/ideas? Or think of the situations when you felt very upset about something someone said – how did you react?

Why is assertive communication so important - Because it is an essential workplace skill! Also, because assertive people are better to work with and establish effective relationships.

Six statements that showcase assertive communication skills, as examples of communication when you want to disagree or provide your own viewpoints as well, or when someone criticizes your words...as can happen in a group discussion...

Agreeing in principle: "As a general rule you're absolutely right ..."

Agree with part of their argument: "Of course you're absolutely right *that* ..."

Admit it is a reasonable argument: "Yes, what you are saying is very logical ..."

Appreciate their feelings: "I can totally understand why you feel that way ..."

Raise objections as an afterthought: "Yes that seems true ... but if ..."

Show that you have anticipated that attack: "Thank you, I was hoping that someone was going to mention that ..." (useful if presenting idea at meetings!)

Remember in assertive communication, you agree with the other person's feelings but ask for further examples, evidence and stand by your own opinion as well. Make use of 'I' statements.

Soft Skills- Session-13

Group Discussion -Leadership & Team Work

Productive business meetings require a leader with the ability to focus the discussion. Business owners with effective group leadership skills, including the ability to listen and organize discussions, can help the company focus on important details during meetings.

Organization

Effective business leaders plan the agenda for group discussions and develop a printed outline for the meetings. Groups have more productive discussions when everyone has a copy of the printed agenda

before the discussion begins. This allows time to review the topics and focus on key issues. The printed agendas should include large blank spaces so attendees can make notes. The leader must also use organizational skills to focus the members on the agenda points during the discussion. Leaders calling attention to the specific agenda points keep the group discussion focused on decision-making.

Listening and Note Taking

Group leaders with highly developed listening skills are able to guide discussions by focusing on what each person is saying during the meeting, while at the same time taking notes as the conversation continues. By listening for repeated phrases and ideas, the leader can direct group members in reaching agreement on topics. For example, if a leader hears members repeatedly refer to job duties as "too complicated," she should focus the discussion by asking group participants what specific things make the duties complicated.

Rephrasing

"Rephrasing" refers to techniques in which leaders ask for more clarification during a group discussion. The leader will typically ask group members for more in-depth opinions after restating the general discussion topic in new terms. Rephrasing allows group members to view topics from different angles and interpretations.

Emotional Control

The leader's emotions, and the emotions of the group members, must be under control for effective discussion. Leadership requires developing a tough skin to take on the lead-discussion duties when tempers flare. Discussion leaders should work to diffuse anger and redirect the emotions with constructive suggestions. Addressing an emotional group member with questions about the reasons for the outburst can provide an avenue to discuss problems more constructively. After dealing with emotions, redirect the focus to agenda topics.

Mediation

Group members typically fall into different participant roles, particularly in permanent groups. Effective group leaders understand the unofficial roles group members take during the discussion and use these members to help mediate group problems. For example, the role of the "tension reducer" is to resolve conflict and anxiety, while the "task master" helps focus the group members on the purpose of the meeting. The leader uses the group's tension reducer to assist in soothing feelings when group participants feel ideas weren't given equal consideration by group members. The leader uses the group's unofficial task master to help keep easily distracted group members focused on the agenda points.

Successful teams are the result of leadership, not luck.

You've felt the pain of teams that struggle. If you're fortunate, you've felt the joy of being part of a great team.

Trust

Great teams trust each other.

One leader wrote, "Great teams habitually do little things that build and reinforce trust."

Another leader wrote, "Make it safe for people to say what they actually think."

Team members build trust when they:

#1. Make and keep commitments.

Trust is depending on someone to keep their commitments. Confusion about commitments destroys teams. When you don't know the commitments of others, you give yourself permission to judge them by the expectations you impose on them. Unclear commitments produce distrust, backstabbing, and gossip.

How to clarify commitments:

At the end of team meetings, ask, "What are your commitments?" If people have multiple commitments, ask them to rank them in order of importance.

Alternative question, "What's your number one commitment as a result of today's meeting?"

Anyone who consistently leaves team meetings without a commitment is irrelevant to the team.

#2. Know strengths, weaknesses, and passions.

It's foolish and frustrating to expect performance out of weakness. You can trust people to perform well where they're strong and passionate and poorly where they're weak and don't care.

You can't trust someone who consistently drops the ball.

Consistent ball-droppers:

- Hope for performance from weakness.

- Don't feel passionate about their responsibilities, goals, and tasks.

- Over-commit to pleasing people.

- Everyone on the team needs to know the top three strengths & weaknesses of everyone on the team.

Leadership behaviours that contribute to a group's task-related functions include providing, seeking, and evaluating information. Leaders may want to be cautious about contributing ideas before soliciting ideas from group members, since the leader's contribution may sway or influence others in the group, therefore diminishing the importance of varying perspectives. Likewise a leader may want to solicit evaluation of ideas from members before providing his or her own judgment. In group situations where creativity is needed to generate ideas or solutions to a problem, the task leader may be wise to facilitate brainstorming and discussion.

A group leader with high communication competence can facilitate brainstorming and group discussion to enhance the creativity and quality of group members' ideas.

This can allow the leader to keep his or her eye on the "big picture" and challenge group members to make their ideas more concrete or discuss their implications beyond the group without adding his or her own opinion. To review, some of the key leadership behaviors that contribute to the task-related functions of a group include the following:

In Group Discussions for selection purposes, the qualities of team work and leadership are observed and evaluated. Person – Job fit matched basis the performance of the candidate in such simulated exercises.

Soft Skills- Session-14

Group Discussion –Industry Expectation

As per the recent statistics, the education sector in India is poised to witness major growth in the years to come as India will have world's largest tertiary-age population and second largest graduate talent pipeline globally by the end of 2020. India's economy is also expected to grow at a fast pace; rapid industrialization would require a gross incremental workforce of ~250 million by 2030; India could potentially emerge as a global supplier of skilled manpower. However, despite these encouraging statistics, a major segment of graduates remain unemployable - according to 'National Employability Report' 2016, which is based on a study of more than 1,50,000 engineering students who graduated in 2015 from over 650 colleges, 80% of them were unemployable and only 3% had suitable skills to be employed in software or product market. Such large segment of the population not getting jobs is indeed a grave problem as it has direct repercussions on the Indian economy and on social conditions. Though educational institutions are training millions of youngsters yet corporate are often complaining that they are not getting the necessary skill and talent required for a job. Not only have they lowered their hiring standards in order to be fully staffed, they are also

conducting training programs to make their hires productive and up to speed. But this arrangement can't last for long as it hampers organization's productivity.

A recent NASSCOM report suggests that by 2020, 2 out of 3 millennials would like to take up a managerial job within 3 years of their joining and the core skill set required by the industry will change fast and newer skills like creative thinking, higher level problem solving, interpersonal skills, innovation, decision making will be in great demand. However, "Skill-based education is somewhat lacking in all the higher education fields in India and management is no different. The focus of management institutes need to shift from theoretical knowledge to skill based education with a more practical and dynamic approach," says Roshni Chakrabarty noting recent trends in MBA education. Therefore, besides imparting the core or technical knowledge, academia should also try to focus on the softer and behavioural aspects such as interpersonal skills, leadership capability, attitude, communication skills (with increased emphasis on learning the English language) team spirit and alike which will play critical role in determining the success of individuals once they join the industry.

So, while in professional courses like MBA etc the practise for Group Discussions (GD) is one such exercise to prepare the future student managers for the industry. GDs for each role has a different selection criteria while the basic common criteria which is being evaluated is -

1. **Knowledge:** Participant exhibits in-depth knowledge on the subject. Clarity of thought Logical Arguments backed by current examples and data. Follows the PEST Model for structuring thoughts and ensuring the discussion encompasses both the big picture and the small details.
2. **Communication:** Fluent, well-paced, structured delivery with appropriate enunciation. Use of business vocabulary. Participant is reflective and displays good non-verbal cues while listening and appreciating. Maintains eye contact, attentive to views of others, maintains good facial expressions, apt use of hands and gestures. Seen jotting down points. Has been consistent throughout the discussion.
3. **Teamwork / Collaboration:** Acts as a leader. Consistently values and encourages all members of group for active participation. Consistently provides thought provoking ideas in team setting. Maintains Group Cohesiveness.
4. **Critical Thinking:** Participant was observed exchanging, defending, and thinking critically about ideas. Participant has a logical, analytical approach to the subject. Assesses the issue from diverse angles, brings in unique ideas supporting with examples. Analyses own and other's views comprehensively.
5. **Interpersonal Skills:** Consistently demonstrates both respect and helpful behaviour. Shares ideas freely and encourages co-participants supporting their efforts. Maintains Group Cohesiveness.
6. **Participation Level:** Excellent participation level. Keen, enthusiastic, well prepared. Has sound knowledge of the subject, initiates the discussion enthusiastically, and maintains the tempo of the group, a regular contributor with unique ideas.

While the above are the common parameters which are being observed in a GD for selection purposes, each position again would be the deciding factor regarding the weightage give to each of these.

- Participants high on extraversion fit well with aggressive and team-oriented cultures, so jobs requiring such skills would have more weightage given to the communication abilities and Interpersonal skills.
- People high on interpersonal skills match up better with a supportive organizational climate than one focused on aggressiveness. Hence, jobs like HR and Finance which are typically support functions might be looking for those who score high on such parameter and are not aggressive.
- People high on critical thinking fit better in organizations that emphasize innovation rather than standardization.

Each job has its own unique requirements and the industry accordingly makes some selection criteria get the most suitable candidates for the same.

What are the Recruiters Looking for in the candidate?

A. **Employability skills**- The skills you have developed inside and outside of school that you can transfer to the workplace

B. **Knowledge and abilities** relating to a particular job

The **ability to identify suitable job opportunities** and self-presentation for applications and interviews. You can't rely on your academics alone to automatically open doors for you after school

Many students already have the employability skills companies are looking for – but they don't realise it!

What are Employability Skills Commonly Known as?

- Key behaviours
- Competencies
- Soft skills
- Transferrable skills
- Personal skills
- Generic skills
- Basic skills

Top Skills that Employers want are:

- Written communication
- Verbal communication
- Flexibility
- Commercial awareness
- Teamwork
- Planning and organising

What employers look for in a candidate?

Can you do the job?

- Do you have the necessary abilities, skills, knowledge, experience and qualifications?
- How soon can you become productive? Are you a fast learner?
- Are you able to work unsupervised, use your initiative and work confidently under pressure?
- Will your work be accurate and high-quality?
- Are you organised and able to achieve goals?

Are you motivated?

- Are you motivated, and do your goals benefit the company?
- Are you dependable (i.e. reliable and trustworthy)?

Do you fit with the organisation?

- Do you have a good attitude?
- Does your presentation and appearance represent the company well?
- Are you a team player? Do you get on well with others? (The employer wants someone who won't create problems among other workers.)

It is your responsibility to provide employers with the best information to help them make a quality hiring decision. If you consider all the needs listed above, you will increase your chances of getting a job offer.

SOFT SKILL

Session No: 15

Group Discussion – Problem Solving & Decision Making

Introduction

Discussions help develop a clear perspective on issues by establishing diverse viewpoints. Sharing ideas and thoughts in the process of discussion, help clear the picture of the situation and help develop new insights leading to the solution. The understanding developed during the discussion equips one to deal with the problem. This is the main purpose of a Group Discussion. It is an interactive oral process where the group members brainstorm, discuss, listen to each other, use voice and gestures effectively with clear language and persuasive skills.

Problem Solving & Decision Making in Group Discussion

The important aspect of Group Discussion is to identify the problem and come to a consensus with an effective solution. The process of Group problem solving is as follows-

Step 1: Define the Problem

Group members share what they know about the current situation, without proposing solutions or evaluating the information. The first task is to establish the known facts highlighted in the problem .

Step 2: Analyse the Problem

At this stage, group members discuss the potential reasons of the problem at hand. Once the problem has been scrutinised, the group can pose a problem question that will direct the group to generate possible solutions.

Step 3: Generate Possible Solutions

During this step, group members generate possible solutions to the problem. The point to consider is that at this stage, evaluation of solutions should be avoided and only probing and clarification of solutions should be discussed.

Step 4: Evaluate Solutions

During this step, solutions can be critically evaluated based on their credibility and completeness of the solution presented . Once the potential solutions have been narrowed down, the group should analyse each solution based on its potential positive and negative effects.

Self-Check Exercise: Group Activity: In a group of 7-8 members, share this situation. Plan a discussion of 10 mins and come to a consensus.

On your way back from a holiday in South America, your shuttle flight to the airport is forced to make an emergency landing in a small clearing in the Brazilian rainforest.

You, the pilot, and your fellow passengers have only sustained minor injuries but the plane has broken into pieces and the communication equipment has been destroyed in the impact.

Before the plane crashed the pilot had reported a problem with one of the engines, so chances are that the authorities will start looking for you when you fail to arrive at your destination. However, the forest is very dense and it will take days to reach the edge on foot.

You cannot remain where you are as there is a danger that the aeroplane fuel will catch fire.

On searching through the wreckage and the remains of your suitcases you find the following items:

1. A guide to South American plant species.
2. 3 elasticated luggage straps
3. 6 frozen airline meals.
4. 4 blankets from the plane
5. A pack of 24 anti-malaria tablets.
6. A 3 metre square piece of opaque plastic sheeting
7. Tourist map of Brazil
8. 2 large bottles of factor 12 sunscreen
9. Mobile phone with GPS, fully charged.
10. 1 litre bottle of the local alcoholic spirit
11. 3 boxes of chocolate chip cookies.
12. 4 current paperback novels
13. First aid box.
14. Compass
15. Flare gun with one flare
16. A Swiss Army knife
17. A book of matches from the hotel

You are unable to carry more than 7 items from this list. Items containing more than one object still count as one item. You have 20 minutes to reach your conclusion and present back to the assessors

Six Hats Method of Decision Making

Edward de Bono developed the Six Hats method of thinking in the late 1980s, and it has since become a regular feature in decision-making training in business and professional contexts. The method's popularity lies in its ability to help people get out of habitual ways of thinking and to allow group members to play different roles and see a problem or decision from multiple points of view. The basic idea is that each of the six hats represents a different way of thinking, and when we figuratively switch hats, we switch the way we think. The hats and their style of thinking are as follows:

- White hat. Objective—focuses on seeking information such as data and facts and then processes that information in a neutral way.
- Red hat. Emotional—uses intuition, gut reactions, and feelings to judge information and suggestions.
- Black hat. Negative—focuses on potential risks, points out possibilities for failure, and evaluates information cautiously and defensively.
- Yellow hat. Positive—is optimistic about suggestions and future outcomes, gives constructive and positive feedback, points out benefits and advantages.
- Green hat. Creative—tries to generate new ideas and solutions, thinks “outside the box.”
- Blue hat. Philosophical—uses metacommunication to organize and reflect on the thinking and communication taking place in the group, facilitates who wears what hat and when group members change hats.

SELF CHECK: Answer the questions based on your learning

This decision-making method has been praised because it allows group members to “switch gears” in their thinking and allows for role playing, which lets people express ideas more freely. How can this help enhance critical thinking? Which combination of hats do you think would be best for a critical thinking sequence?

1. What combinations of hats might be useful if the leader wanted to break the larger group up into pairs and why? For example, what kind of thinking would result from putting Yellow and Red together, Black and White together, or Red and White together, and so on?
2. Based on your preferred ways of thinking and your personality, which hat would be the best fit for you? Which would be the most challenging? Why?

Group Discussion is a way to solve problem with brainstorming and reaching to a consensus. Watch the video on ‘Group Problem Solving and Brainstorming’ and answer the following questions. Use Link https://youtu.be/NDSFnpKs_lo

Questions:

- (a) Discuss the step wise process of problem solving
- (b) State the group dynamics used during Problem solving exercise
- (c) State the top to skills required to take effective decisions and problem solving.

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SOFT SKILL
Session No: 16
Group Discussion: Roles During Group Discussion

Introduction

GD is a technique used by an institutions/ organization to gauge whether the candidate has the required behavioural skills and personality traits that it desires for the given role.

In this session, we will discuss the different roles that participants play in Group Discussion. Let us first understand the structure of group discussion.

Structure of Group Discussion

An effective group comprises of 8-10 members, seated in U or V shape. The objective is to present the ideas to the whole group and reach to the consensus. Also, this type of setting, makes it convenient for all the members to create good eye contact with each other.

Once the topic is announced by the evaluator, participants are given time (approximately 2-3 minutes) to develop their ideas and prepare their notes. After the buffer time is over, the topic is open for discussion. The participants are required to discuss the topic for given period of time (approximately 15-20 minutes). Participants are required to conclude the discussion by presenting the summary of the discussion.

Process of Group Discussion

As discussed earlier, Group discussion is a form of communication, which is usually informal in nature. In the formal set up of selection process, formality of conduct is expected from the participants.

Here is the three stage process of conducting Group Discussion

a. Initiation

To initiate the discussion one needs to be thorough with the basic concepts and have an idea of the topic. It is a bonus if you can support your reasoning with facts and figures. In order to make your speech more interesting, you can start with a quote, a small anecdote which is relevant to the topic. State your opinion and elaborate your stance with justifying your viewpoint.

Discussion

Once the topic has taken its shape , you enter into next phase of discussion. It is important to share your point of view, but equally essential to listen to other members, add on and build on the points and lead the discussion in an unbiased manner.

b. Conclusion

Towards the end of discussion summarization is an opportunity get the attention of the evaluator. Putting together the whole discussion by highlighting the main points, sharing the opinions of all and coming to the middle path is the key to conclude the discussion. A summary should be brief and concise. No new points should be added for further discussion as you are supposed to give a gist of the discussion.

Roles in Group Discussion

During the process of group discussion, a participant undergoes the structured three stage phase with Initiation, Discussion and Conclusion. Every stage has specific role to be played by the participants.

1. Role of a leader: The discussion begins with initiator setting the direction of the topic. The Initiator is one who leads the group by giving the right direction. The participant who takes the lead and initiates the topic, bears the onus to navigate the discussion and give a right direction to the topic. Here is a stepwise guide to be followed by the initiator.

Step 1: Greet- To break the ice and begin the session, greeting everyone is a positive start. The participant who wishes to initiate the session should seek it as an opportunity to lead the session and drive it in a direction.

Step 2: Explain topic- after greeting, the topic should be broken down, identifying the main keywords. The initiator should explain the keywords to build the background of the discussion.

Step 3: State Opinion- Once the background of the session is built, the initiator should use this as an opportunity to state his/ her viewpoint with student justification to establish the participation in the discussion.

Tip: Refrain from sharing all ideas and opinion at the initial stage. Use this stage as an opportunity to navigate the discussion into one direction

2. Role as Team Players: During the course of group discussion, participants are not individual players but have to emerge as strong team players. The objective is to get along with the group. In this stage participants have to use the skills of strong team players. Some common skills to showcase during this stage are-

(i) **Listen:** Be respectful to others opinion and pay attention to what others are speaking. Listen before you speak is the key to perform during discussion.

(ii) **Be respectful to others:** Think before you respond. As a team player, try to analyze other's viewpoint and based on the comprehension, respond appropriately with right tone and idea.

(iii) **As a team player,** support those members who are not getting opportunity to speak. Refrain from directly questioning anyone at any given point.

3. Role as a coordinator: In order to coordinate the group dynamics and reach to the desired goal, it is important to play the effective role of coordinating between different members of the group. The participants need to be vigilant about the various aspects of topic covered in the discussion. Moreover, timely bringing the discussion to the closure is an important task to be performed by the coordinator of the group.

Self-Check Exercise:

Question: Determine the two most important skills required in the position of Leader, Contributor and Coordinator.

Conclusion

Group Discussion involves different roles of the participants. These roles highlight the skill sets required to perform effectively in the discussion. Nurturing these skills help the participants to showcase their opinion in the efficient way, making the discussion fruitful. Moreover, the structure of group discussion establishes the objective to be achieved during the discussion.

Group Discussion – Phrase/ Language to be used during GD

Introduction

Group Discussion may sound a cacophonous idea of many individuals, there stems many management points that can be noticed in an individual. Skills of management level and expertise in cooling down a situation can easily be recognized during discussion of a topic. Let's discuss the four different expressions to use in group discussion

Expression 1: Giving Opinion- This is a situation when you are expressing your opinion. In such situations, the objective is to establish the idea, a thought or a viewpoint in the group. In these situations, usage of phrases like, I believe that one should..., In my opinion....., etc.

Expression 2: Giving Opposite Opinion- When you are expressing arguments in opposition to the statement made. In this scenario, the objective is to listen to the other person, comprehend and analyze the viewpoint and give the counter arguments by justifying with real time examples. For example, “with due respect, I would only partly agree to that...” and “I feel it wouldn't be right to....”

Experience 3: Clarifying your opinion- When you state your opinion, use right connectors and linkage words to elaborate your viewpoint. The objective is to set your opinion and establish your viewpoint with concrete examples. Use phrases like “My honest opinion would be that...”, “The way I see it....”, “The point I would like to make is that...”

Self-Check Exercise: Take any current business topic and write quick notes on the topic stating your ideas and viewpoints. Now audio record yourself while using the phrases from ‘Giving Opinion’(Fig 1). Listen to the audio and analyzed how well you used the phrases. Practice it often.

Experience 4: Giving yourself time to think- During discussion, when you are establishing your viewpoints, use right phrases that will help you buy out some time to structure your thoughts and present your point in the discussion.

Self-Check Exercise : Note: Write your answers at the space given below. Read the text and use the right form of the word in the bracket to form a word that fits in the numbered space..

The _____ (sure) way of antagonizing others in the GD as well as the examiner is to appoint yourself as a de facto _____ (chair) 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 _____ (flow) 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 _____ (speak). Maintain eye contact with as many members of the group as possible. This will involve others in what you are saying and increase your _____ (chance) of carrying them with you. Do this even if you are _____ (answer) a specific point raised by one person.

Grammar: Linkage Words for Group Discussion- In any piece of writing the sentences and the ideas in them are logically related by certain words or phrases that are known as linkers. These linkers have different functions and belong to different parts of speech. These may be pronouns, conjunctions, conditionals, determiners, etc. Let us look at some of the linkers and their functions in the following table:

Linkers	Functions
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And, as well as, moreover	Used to add new elements
Or, In other words, Alternatively	Used to express opposite ideas or an alternative choice
But, However, On the other hand, On the contrary, Even though	Used to express contrast
Because, Since, For, As	Giving a cause for a particular statement
Therefore, consequently, so that hence	Used to express a result
If, Provided that. Otherwise, In case, Unless	Used to express condition

Self -Check Exercise : Note: 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 _____ 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, _____ are too nervous to speak _____ are waiting for someone else to start. _____ the evaluators get the best chance to observe the opening speaker. Now this is a double-edged sword. _____ the opening speaker talks sense, naturally s/he will get credit because s/he opened the discussion and took the group in the right direction. _____ on the other hand, the first speaker doesn't make too much sense, s/he will attract the undivided attention of the evaluators to his shortcomings. She/he will be marked as a person _____ speaks without thinking merely for the sake of speaking. S/he will be seen as someone who leads the group in the wrong direction _____ does not make a positive contribution to the group. So remember, speaking first is a high-risk high return strategy. It can make _____ mar your GD performance depending how you handle it. Speak first only _____ you have something sensible to say. _____ keep quiet and let someone else start.

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SOFT SKILL- Session No: 18

Group Discussion – Do's & Don'ts of Group Discussion

Introduction

In Group Discussion, it is imperative to maintain decorum. The aim of group discussion is not merely to impress the evaluator but putting forth the firm belief by your ideas and viewpoints. To maintain your constant position in a discussion, firstly you should establish yourself in a better position than others and use valid reasons to state your ideas and thoughts.

Group discussion are usually shortlisting criteria during selection process and. Respecting others opinion and agreeing to them wherever you feel the other participants are correct is important. Check your behaviour, being aggressive or submissive will not fetch you in good books of the evaluator, in fact maintain assertive behaviour throughout the discussion. Another important feature to create your impression is to dress impeccably. One should have a winning attitude and grooming speaks a lot about yourself.

Code of Conduct of Group Discussion

It is imperative to maintain decorum and follow the general code of conduct in a Group Discussion. Here is a note to follow -

Do's

- o Speak nicely and politely to the group.
- o Respect the viewpoint of every speaker.
- o Learn to disagree politely as it is not a platform to create arguments.
- o Structure your thoughts and analyse before you put forward your viewpoint.
- o Try to stick to the discussion topic. Avoid digressing from the main topic. Don't introduce irrelevant information.
- o Be aware of your body language when you are speaking.
- o Agree with and acknowledge what you find interesting.

Self Check Exercise: Out of the Do's listed above; identify three, which are very important. Say why

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Don'ts

- o Lose your temper. A discussion is not an argument.
- o Shout. Use a moderate tone and medium pitch.
- o Use too many gestures when you speak. Gestures like finger pointing and table thumping can appear aggressive.
- o Dominate the discussion. Confident speakers should allow quieter students a chance to contribute.
- o Draw too much on personal experience or anecdote. Although some tutors encourage students to reflect on their own experience, remember not to generalise too much.
- o Interrupt. Wait for a speaker to finish what they are saying before you speak.

Self Check Exercise: Out of the Don'ts listed above; identify three, which are very important. Say why

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Leading a Discussion

You may be in a seminar group that requires you to lead a group discussion, or lead a discussion after an oral presentation. You can demonstrate leadership by:

- o introducing yourself and the members of the group
- o stating the purpose of the discussion
- o inviting quiet group members to speak
- o being objective
- o summarizing the discussion

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

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

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Soft Skills- Session 19

Cover Letter and Resume

Introduction- Applications or Cover Letter are normally accompanied by Résumés. The short-listing of applicants in the initial screening depends to a large extent on the manner in which applications are drafted. A well-written application accompanied by a judiciously drafted Résumé is most likely to facilitate your progress to the first stage of the recruiter's selection process.

Purpose of Cover Letter/Application- Applications are written in one's own individual style, unlike Résumés, which are in a telegraphic style, without any emphasis on grammar. An application serves the purpose of arousing enough interest in the employer to read the Résumé.

Guidelines for Drafting Applications

Some tips for drafting applications are discussed below:

1. Try to include details, which do not appear in the CV.
2. It should be based on facts.
3. It should be addressed by name.
4. The salutation should preferably be e.g. '*Dear Mr Prasad*' rather than '*Dear Sir/ Madam*'.

This indicates the motivational level of the applicant and the interest taken to research the company, with the intention of joining it.

5. The application should mention your accomplishments and also your personality traits and attitudes. For example: Dependable, time management skills, leadership skills.
5. Be short: The application should not be more than one page.
6. Quality: Make sure that you proofread the application thoroughly. There must be no spelling or grammar mistakes.
7. Paper used: The paper used should be of top quality.

Format of the Application

In the first paragraph, the applicant should gain the employer's attention. This can be done by drawing the attention to the key requirements of the job and stating that you meet them. This should be done in a crisp, emphatic and precise manner. For example, if the employer has advertised for position, which requires inter-personal skills, then your opening paragraph could be on the following lines:

Sustaining Interest of the Employer

The middle portion of the application summarizes (not repeats) the skills set, experience, and personal attributes and draws the employer's attention to the Résumé. Not repeating the contents but summarizing them is an art, which must be practiced.

For example, if you have had an excellent academic career and you have mentioned the grades obtained in your Résumé, then you could interpret the same, in your application, in the following manner:

Closing of the Application

In the final paragraph, the applicant could request for an interview and end the letter on a positive note,

Illustrative Examples of a Good Application

Dear Mr. Sharma,

I am responding to your advertisement in Times of India dated 22 July 2020, which calls for Marketing Executives with good communication and interpersonal skills. I believe that my qualification and experience have imbibed in me these requirements.

During my Summer Internship Project, I had the opportunity to work with L&T. My project and the recommendations made were accepted. I also had an opportunity to organize a number of management meets and intra college competitions which enhanced my organisation and leadership skills.

In addition to my specialization in Marketing, I have also studied Finance, which would give me a better perspective of my function as a Marketing Executive.

My qualifications and experience have been summarized in my Résumé, which is enclosed.

I would request the opportunity to meet you and discuss my candidature in detail.

Warm regards

ABC

Some positive points in this application are:

1. Salutation is with a name: This gives identity and importance to the employer.
 2. It does not repeat what would have been included in the Résumé. It amplifies and interprets what appears in the Résumé.
 3. This letter sounds less egoistic.
 4. Good, positive and polite closing.
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Soft Skills- Session 20 Cover Letter and Resume

A resume is a persuasive summary of an individual's qualifications for the purpose of employment. It is prepared with the objective of summarizing a description of oneself, as it relates to the job one is applying for. In a way it represents, the writer in absentia. It is a brief factual document.

Different kinds of Resumes -There are two basic kinds of resumes- Chronological and Skill based resumes.

A chronological resume summarises what you did in a timeline (starting from the most recent and going to the backward in **reverse chronology**). It emphasizes degrees, job titles and dates.

A skills resume emphasizes the skills . While writing a skill resume, the candidate uses as headings the skills, combine experience from paid jobs, activities or volunteer work to show experience in that skill e.g. administration, finance, speaking etc.

Parts of a Resume

- | | |
|--|-----------------------|
| ▪ Name; Email; Mobile number | Objectives |
| ▪ Education / Qualifications. | Work experience. |
| ▪ Summer Internship Program | Personal information. |
| ▪ Skills/ Accomplishments/ Interests | References. |
| ▪ Achievements/ Awards/ Service Activities | |

Preparation of a Résumé

Career Objective- a vague and ambiguous objective is certain to be counterproductive, as it would convey to the employer that you are not sure of what you want. It could also be considered as an unnecessary padding and irritate the employer.

Vague objectives Ex: "...To work in a managerial assignment in a thriving organization."

Properly drafted objectives Ex :".... An entry level management assignment in the marketing of financial products in banking industry...."

Education/ Qualifications- Though there is no standard sequence for laying out the contents of a Résumé, it is advisable to list them out in the order of priority. Therefore, in the case of students who have no/very limited work experience, qualifications will be a major selling point and may precede experience. Qualifications could go beyond academic accomplishments.

Here are some recommendations regarding what to include under the heading Education.

1. Include school names, locations, dates attended, and degrees of certificates earned.
2. Decide whether to include your grade-point average. Certainly if it is high, it should be included. If your grade-point average is low, omit it.

Work Experience- List your jobs in reverse chronological order; put the present or most recent one first. Keep in mind the following points:

1. Give the name, locations, and dates of employment for each company.
2. Insert you position and title, if any, beside each company.
3. Use verbs that show your major accomplishments while working for each company; be precise as to the results of your work experiences.

Follow the rules of parallelism, making two or more elements in a series similar in grammatical word structure. Manager, representative, salesperson, accountant are all parallels because each is a job title and a noun. Managing, filing, word processing, planning are parallel. Most often the verbs are in the past tense when describing activities performed for a company.

Know Your Skills- Verbs suggest action; using them to describe your skills gives the impression that you are a dynamic person. For example

- Enjoyed analyzing financial data
- Prepared consulting proposal in response to tender offers
- Coordinated off-campus internships
- Delighted to speak before groups-both in college and outside.

Know Your Accomplishments- Record accomplishments. What may be trivial to you may be important to the employer. Some Examples-

- Winning the scholarship award allowed me to travel to Europe (*education*)
- Joining the Orators group helped me being elected chairperson (*extracurricular activities*)

Know Your Interest- Analyzing your interests, preferences, and attitudes can help you determine in what type of job you can use your skills.

Know Your Personal Values- Values can also be applied to a job and what you seem to get from them. Look at the following descriptions; each has a value attached to them

Achievements, Awards, Service Activities- Receiving any award deserves mention in a resume. Additional items often include offices held, athletic accomplishments, published materials, fluency in foreign languages, speaking awards (debate, extemporaneous contests) etc.

Personal Data (Optional)- Common inclusions under personal data include health, hobbies, physical skills, travel.

References (Optional)

- Limit your list to two individuals; complete the information about how they may be reached via phone or E-mail. Avoid including relatives as references.
- Choose individuals such as former work supervisors, professors, teachers, colleagues, or business friends.
- Be sure you have the permission of the individual whose name you use as a reference.

Formatting- There is no standard format. But, the key is to keep it simple. Some of the points to be borne in mind are as follows:

1. Do not use abbreviations or acronyms.
 2. Be careful of spelling mistakes.
 3. Word-process your Résumé. Use a standard font. Do not use fancy fonts (unless applying for jobs which require a high degree of creativity or you are including graphics). Use of italics should be restricted.
 4. Section headings, names may be typed in bold.
 5. The layout on the page should be balanced. Leave sufficient margins.
 6. Print your Résumé on a laser printer. Use good quality paper.
 7. Your Résumé should always be accompanied by an application/ covering letter.
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