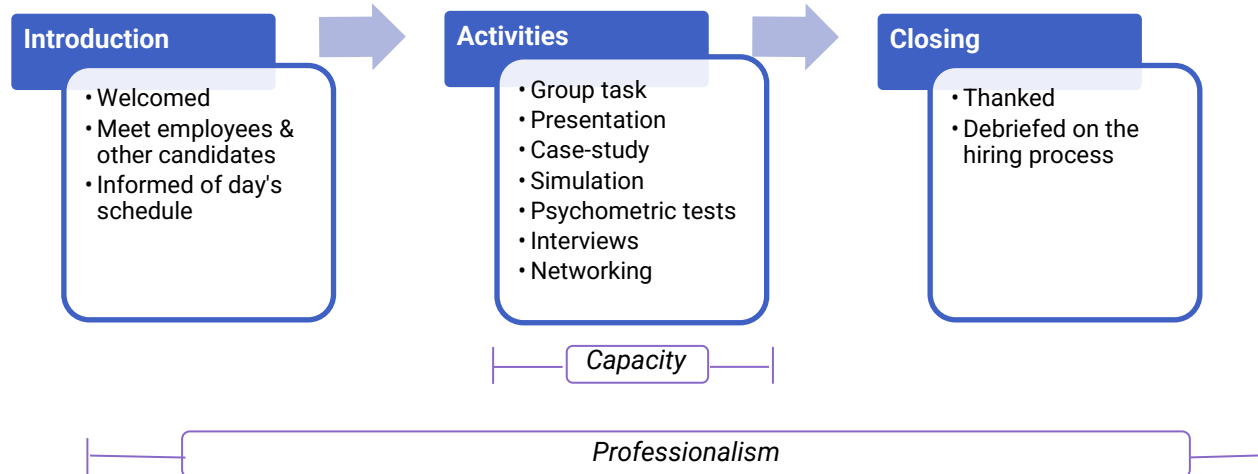# Assessment Centre Guide

What is an assessment centre?

An assessment centre is a broad term used to describe an event that organisations hold as one of the stages in the recruitment process. Candidates complete activities assessing various aspects of their capacity and personal alignment to the company, team, and role ('fit'), which predict job performance. Assessment centres usually occur at the organisation's office and most often run as half or full-day events, although some can occur across multiple days. The content changes depending on the organisation and which position is being recruited. Despite the variability in each assessment centre, there are some common activities conducted, skills assessed, and techniques used to evaluate candidates. Increasing awareness of the process, and practicing activities, can lead to improved performance in assessment centres.

This document will cover the phases of an assessment centre, common activities, and discuss the importance of professionalism. Key advice is provided throughout.

Introduction
- Welcomed
- Meet employees & other candidates
- Informed of day's schedule

Activities
- Group task
- Presentation
- Case-study
- Simulation
- Psychometric tests
- Interviews
- Networking

Closing
- Thanked
- Debriefed on the hiring process

Capacity

Professionalism

Capacity = Candidate's knowledge, skills, ability, intelligence, personality.
Professionalism = Candidate's work etiquette, motivation, emotional intelligence, and interpersonal skills.

1. Introduction

Candidates arrive and often have light refreshments while being introduced to the organisation, usually by HR team who provide an overview of the organisation and discuss the day's schedule. Candidates may be placed into groups and complete an ice-breaker activity.

Key advice:

- Ensure you are professional and polite as soon as you walk into the building
- Pro-actively engage with other candidates to enhance performance in the group work activities

2. Activities

Candidates rotate through different activity stations assessing their knowledge, skill, abilities, intelligence, and fit (values, culture, interpersonal).

Commonly assessed skills

• Communication (written and verbal)	• Presentation
• Teamwork and interpersonal	• Adaptability/Flexibility/Resilience
• Analytical/Problem Solving	• Creativity and innovation
• Time management/Organisational	• Leadership

*Technical skills may be assessed e.g. financial or software

A. Group activities

Candidates are assigned to groups to complete a task together. The tasks may require some discipline-specific knowledge (e.g. reviewing financial reports) or be discipline-neutral tasks (e.g. building a bridge with Lego; or reviewing charities and deciding which charity the organisation should support). Discipline-neutral tasks may be more common when the position is advertised across broad knowledge/degree backgrounds.

Group-tasks often focus on assessing communication, interpersonal, problem solving, and organisation skills. Assessors are seated around the room observing the interaction between candidates. They observe and grade whether candidates demonstrate positive or negative behaviours for each skill or interest. For example, positive team-work behaviour includes contributing valuable ideas, and seeking opinions of others. Negative behaviours include repeating others' ideas, interrupting, and dominating the discussion (see Table 1 for a complete list).

Key advice during the group activities:

- Plan the structure of the activity before rushing into it, and discuss roles (e.g. time keeper)
- Actively engage in the discussion, contribute ideas, and encourage others' involvement
- Articulate ideas with confidence through appropriate tone, volume, and body language
- Work collaboratively to achieve the desired outcome and develop creative solutions
- Challenge ideas if needed and offer counter-ideas in a polite and respectful manner

How to practice before the assessment centre:

- Practice in class tutorials (group activities or discussion)
- Use positive behaviours and avoid negative behaviours (see Table 1)

B. Presentations

Presentations are mostly an assessment of communication skills. Specifically, whether candidates articulate information in a clear and engaging manner. It is also a chance for the assessor to examine knowledge (accurate, appropriate) and the candidate's thought process (analytical, logical, creative).

Candidates may be given a task to undertake (e.g. conduct a review) and subsequently present information (e.g. summary, solution, recommendations) back to the assessors – individually or as part of a group presentation.

Key advice

- You are often given little preparation time – ensure you structure key points logically
- If given the option that all members can present or selected members, ensure you are one of the presenting members to demonstrate your presentation ability and motivation
- Ensure you display positive verbal and non-verbal behaviours (clarity, speed, eye-contact, tone, body-movements)

C. Other activities that may occur in assessment centres

- Cognitive ability (verbal, numerical, abstract reasoning) and personality assessments
- Interviews with various staff (Use the [Interview Skills Guide](#))
- Networking with specific directors and managers of the area
- Case study / Simulations. Some examples:
  - Analyse data and produce a summary report
  - Create code to solve a software problem
  - Complete an in-tray task (simultaneously answer emails and calls)

3. Closing

The activities come to an end. Often followed by a briefing by the organisation of the hiring process.

Offer/invite

Organisations often try to make offers or invitations to the next stage quite quickly after an assessment centre has been conducted. If they wait too long then they may lose quality candidates. However, they also need time to evaluate candidates. Some organisations will make offers on the same day and usually up to a week after. It is best not to contact the organisation regarding the outcome, but if you do not hear back from them after 1-2 weeks then consider reaching out to politely request the status of your application.

Key advice:

- Always answer your phone in a professional manner (e.g. "Hello, Sam speaking")
- Activate a professional voicemail
- Start preparing for the next stage

Professional Etiquette

Ensure you are polite, professional, motivated, and engaged. You are being assessed throughout the entire recruitment process – both during activities and through staff and fellow candidate interactions. Some staff interactions include meeting the receptionist, talking with HR during briefings, observers in group activities, interviews with senior staff, and phone contact pre- or post-event. Consider the impression formed during all phases. For example, imagine the perception of a candidate who after finishing an activity makes a positive comment ("that was fun") or a negative comment ("I'm glad that's over").

Key things to help prepare for an assessment centre

- Be aware of the event schedule and read any pre-event material
- Ensure you know how to get to the location and arrive 10-15 minutes early
- Research and know the industry, organisation, and role (what skills are they looking for?)
- Be prepared to actively participate on the day
- Think of questions to ask
- Be professional, be motivated, be enthusiastic, and dress well (prepare in advance)
- Stay calm (prepare, practice, know your strengths & weaknesses, get sleep the night before)

Table 1. Positive and negative behavioural indicators for selected skills

Verbal communication

Positive / Effective	Negative / Less Effective
☐ **Speaks clearly and confidently**	☐ Mumbles or hesitates (lacking confidence)
☐ **Speaks at an appropriate pace and tone**	☐ Speaks quickly or in a monotone
☐ **Keeps to the point (concise)**	☐ Verbose
☐ **Uses straightforward language**	☐ Is indirect in their message
☐ **Listens actively, good eye contact and posture**	☐ Sounds hesitant, poor eye contact or posture
☐ **Uses positive and inclusive language**	☐ Uses negative, divisive, inappropriate language

Team work & Interpersonal Awareness

Positive / Effective	Negative / Less Effective
☐ **Active listener – shows they have heard others**	☐ Ignores or interrupts others
☐ **Contributes new ideas or builds on others'**	☐ Contributions limited or does not add to ideas
☐ **Assertive when faced with difficulty/differences**	☐ Aggressive when faced with differences
☐ **Challenges others' opinions respectfully**	☐ Too accepting/dismissive/critical of opinions
☐ **Adapts opinion to align with logic and evidence**	☐ Persists with ideas that the group has rejected
☐ **Encourages & supports others and their ideas**	☐ Dominates, blocks, or excludes others
☐ **Moves group forward to achieve common goals**	☐ Steers the group away from goals
☐ **Summarises various information coherently**	☐ Slows group down unnecessarily
☐ **Volunteers for tasks within the team**	☐ Fails to get involved
☐ **Influences and persuades others**	☐ Dismisses others

Planning and Organising

Positive / Effective	Negative / Less Effective
☐ **Proposes a plan/agenda and sets goals**	☐ Attempts task with no plan or goal
☐ **Prioritises tasks appropriately**	☐ Defines urgent tasks as merely important
☐ **Adapts priorities to meet changes**	☐ Fails to adapt plan to meet new challenges
☐ **Monitors and completes tasks on time**	☐ Disregards or wastes time
☐ **Completes task to a high standard**	☐ Tasks incomplete or to a poor standard
☐ **Ensures group follows instructions**	☐ Rushes into resolving without planning
☐ **Delegates tasks or responsibilities**	☐ Retains tasks for self

Analytical/Problem Solving

Positive / Effective	Negative / Less Effective
☐ **Identifies and defines the problem**	☐ Attempts to solve a different problem
☐ **Gathers all relevant information**	☐ Does not consider important aspects
☐ **Critically evaluates information**	☐ Uses flawed or illogical reasoning
☐ **Develops multiple solutions or approaches**	☐ Considers only one approach
☐ **Evaluates ideas against goals & feasibility**	☐ Solutions considered are misaligned/unfeasible

UNSW
SYDNEY