



Pareto

Assessment Centres

What is an Assessment Centre?

Assessment centres take the recruitment process to the next level, going a step further than a traditional interview. Regularly used by larger organisations or recruitment agencies looking to assess a number of candidates at once, assessment centres can successfully combine a number of different methods to put you through your paces and determine skills and attributes that may not normally come across in a standard interview. While they can add pressure and competition by placing you as 'one of many', they also offer you more opportunity to showcase yourself and show what you're made of, creating a more effective and fair play field when it comes to finding the right person for the job. So if you know what to expect and put some basic prep in ahead of time, an assessment centre could work in your favour and land you that perfect role.





Before the Assessment Centre

If you've been invited along to an assessment centre, it's likely you've already passed the initial stages of the recruitment process. Whether you've been subject to a telephone interview or picked out based upon your CV, it's important to remember that the assessment centre is the 'next step', and as such, requires some planning and preparation. Practice makes perfect: Many careers services offer practice assessment centre sessions to give you a taster of what's to come. They can also provide sample psychometric or aptitude tests so you know what to expect. Alternatively call upon your recruiter, family and friends: all want you to succeed and should be able to help you prepare.

Research: Ensure you know the organisation you're applying to inside out. Read any literature you've been sent and re-read the job description or specification for indications as to what the organisation is looking for. Go over your own CV also, and be careful you don't get caught out. It may also help to plan some questions about the company and role ahead of the day.

Logistics: All those top tips for preparation for an interview count here too. So ensure your shoes shined and shirt ironed, don the power suit and tie, check your transport arrangements. Turning up late is the biggest faux-pas of them all: think ahead and ensure you're covered for every eventuality.

What happens on the day?

The format of the day will vary according to the organisation, industry and position you're looking for. Every Assessment Centre is designed to assess graduates or candidates for skills and competencies that will match what the recruiters are looking for. However, there are some aspects that tend to be reasonably typical. Throughout the assessment centre you can expect to undertake a variety of different tasks, with assessors utilising a combination of methods including:

- Introductions
- Group work exercises
- One-on-one interviews
- Presentations
- Aptitude and psychometric tests
- Informal observation
- Case studies
- Written tasks
- Question and answer sessions

Some assessment centres will set you tasks you can prepare ahead of time; others prefer to see how you perform under pressure on the day. Whatever shape or form.

Don't forget that many assessors are observing you both in and outside of tasks, so it's important to remain professional and on the ball. If there is an opportunity for informal networking, ensure you're engaging with fellow candidates or staff from within the organisation, asking questions and ensuring you make yourself memorable.





What are the recruiters and assessors looking for?

The specifics of what recruiters and assessors are looking for will depend upon the role you're applying to, but at any level and in any industry, there are some core competencies and attributes that will be sure to set you above the crowd.

Unlike the common misconception of many, assessment centres aren't simply looking for the person who gets every task right: ironically, the candidate who doesn't get the right answer but demonstrates effective problem solving and teamwork skills in reaching that point will score far better than the one who jumps to the right conclusion without showcasing how they got there.

Assessment days for entry-level candidates also don't tend to focus upon where you've been or your experience: they look at your potential and where you could go. It's important to demonstrate your personality and who you are as an individual, rather than regurgitate your CV. If you are dynamic and get involved, you'll give recruiters and assessors an opportunity to see what you can offer.

They don't need to be told what they already know: give them something new! There is a balance. Recruiters aren't looking for the last one standing or the candidate who can shout the loudest, but equally, a wallflower will fade into the background. Ensure you are positive, enthusiastic and demonstrate confidence and responsiveness to everything going on around you. At the same time, remember that overly competitive behaviour such as talking over your peers or pushing to lead every task and activity can come across as arrogance. It's important to demonstrate your ability to work with others as part of a team, to listen and respond, and show diplomacy, tact and understanding. Your communication skills are what will make you stand out from the crowd, rather than your ability to make yourself heard.

Be yourself at your best

Remember that you are selling yourself. While it's important to show those attributes that recruiters are looking for, don't pretend to be someone you're not: it's about knowing your strong points and playing to those strengths, showing what you're capable of without viewing the assessment day as a play in which you are acting out a role. If you're concentrating on showcasing your true skills and attributes, you'll be far more comfortable and more likely to succeed.



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