

Assessment Centres

Assessment Centres are usually one of the last stages of an application process, and are designed for employers to be able to observe and assess candidates beyond only an interview setting. You will be faced with a range of exercises, some of which will be a surprise on the day as the observers will want to see how you use initiative to respond to an unexpected situation.

Assessment Centres can take place either in-person or online- you will be assessed on the same areas but the tasks may be slightly different e.g. an e-tray exercise for a virtual assessment centre vs a face to face presentation at an in-person assessment day.

Observation takes place at all times (even breaks) and you will most likely have someone watching you and making notes. The observers are not looking for you to fail; in fact they want to find some great candidates who will be an asset to their firm. The trick is to try and act as naturally as possible in a very unnatural setting.

General Preparation for all Assessment Centres

- Read all of the information sent to you by the firm and any preparation materials.
- Try to get some inside information either via contacts who have been through the assessment centre or online undergrad/grad forums.
- Understand the firm and its culture, structure and clients. Consider your personal interest in the firm or specific aspects of their work beyond the facts so that you can differentiate yourself from other candidates and confidently describe your personal alignment with the firm.
- Do some practise exercises in advance for the case study/written element, psychometric tests or situational analysis tasks.
- Prepare for the interview element of the assessment day (refer to our separate interview advice document)
- Keep in mind that the observers are interested in who you are as a person and your soft skills. Be prepared to show your teamwork, interpersonal skills, enthusiasm and motivation using both verbal and non-verbal communication.
- Develop your commercial awareness through reading, networking with others and developing a thorough understanding of the sector. Strong commercial knowledge should form the backdrop of many of your interview responses and the approach you take to completing assessment centre exercises.

Assessment Centres: Law

- Group exercise can involve negotiating a commercial scenario. You won't necessarily need legal knowledge but you will need to discuss the relevant points with the other group members and come to the best solution for your hypothetical client.
- Written exercise is often writing a letter to a client. Pay attention to spelling and grammar and make sure to complete the task on time with the relevant points clearly laid out.
- Key skills to demonstrate: Analytical, eloquent written/verbal communication, problem solving, ability to apply information to a specific scenario, time management.



Assessment Centres: Finance/Banking

- Written or group exercises can focus on numerical reasoning and data analysis. You may be given quite complex information in graphical format or statistical data and be asked to analyse and present logical recommendations either as a presentation or in writing.
- Key skills to demonstrate: Numerical reasoning, logical thinking, ability to understand and interpret financial data, presentation, communication and working well under pressure.

Assessment Centres: Civil Service Fast Stream

- Half day virtual assessment centre which includes a leadership scenario, a team exercise and a written task.
- CSFS provides a long guide with really useful information about how to prepare for the assessment day <https://www.faststream.gov.uk/media/FSAC-Guide.pdf>. It is a highly competitive grad scheme so essential to do some practise tests in advance. If you aren't sure if the Civil Service is for you, this document provides an overall insight into the required skills and type of work you may be doing.
- Key Skills to demonstrate: Seeing the big picture, changing and improving, making effective decisions, communicating and influencing, working together, developing yourself and others.

Role Play Exercises

DO	DON'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try to stay calm and get yourself into character whilst staying true to yourself 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completely change your character and act like a different person; although the scenario is fictional, the observers want you to be the best version of yourself in that scenario.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be aware of the competencies and skills required in the role you are applying for and try to demonstrate these in the role play. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow yourself to become angry or flustered by the responses of your role play partner.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build rapport with your role play partner, although they may deliberately try to antagonise you to see how you react e.g. in a scenario where a customer is complaining about a faulty product. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lose track of time and fail to reach a conclusion by the end of the session.



Group Exercises

DO	DON'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Articulate your opinion and contribute to the discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dominate the group or stay too quiet. No-one wants to work with someone who either doesn't listen to others or who doesn't contribute anything to the team.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make sure your tone and body language reflect a collaborative and personable nature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jump straight into the task before reading the instructions and understanding what is actually required
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on completing the task within the required timeframe. This demonstrates time management, focus and ability to complete a task effectively. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forget about the commercial context of the firm and the factors you would need to consider e.g. market share, profit/loss margins, general economic climate etc.

Presentations

DO	DON'T
Practice your presentation in advance which increases confidence and allows you to get feedback from a neutral audience	Use too many slides or cover your slides in loads of text and images. Keep slides minimalistic so that the audience focuses on you.
Have a clear structure with a logical beginning and conclusion at an appropriate level for the audience	Rely on your notes or visual aids at the expense of building rapport and engaging the audience.
Anticipate questions from the audience. Take your time to respond in a calm, articulate manner	Be scared to show passion and feeling during the presentation. This will allow the audience to buy into you as a person.

